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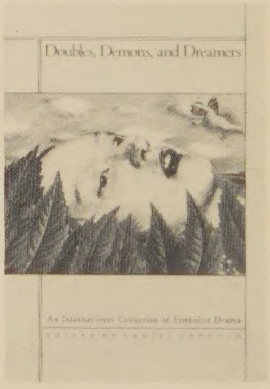

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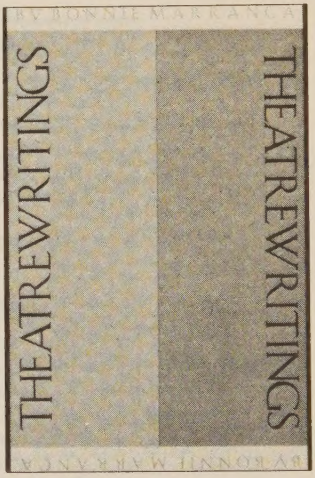

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PERFORMING ARTS JOURNAL • 25

A Periodical of Performing Arts Journal Publications
PAJ 25 (Volume IX / Number 1)

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Copyright © 1985 *Performing Arts Journal*. *Performing Arts Journal* is published three times a year by Performing Arts Journal Publications, Inc. Editorial and business office address: 325 Spring Street, Room 318; New York; N.Y. 10013. Tel. (212) 243-3885/243-3974. Unsolicited manuscripts will not be forwarded without return postage. Subscription rates are as follows: Individual: $14.00 (one yr.); $27.00 (two yrs.); $40.00 (three yrs.). Libraries/Institutions: $24.00 (one yr.); $44.00 (two yrs.); $66.00 (three yrs.). Foreign, including Canada, add $6.00 per year for postage. All foreign orders must be payable in U.S. currency. Claims for missing issues will not be honored more than three months after publication; foreign claims, five months.
Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 76-6682. ISSN: 0735-8393.

Performing Arts Journal is listed in *The American Humanities Index, a Quarterly Index to Scholarly, Critical, and Creative Journals.* Book reviews are indexed in *Book Review Index.*

Performing Arts Journal is distributed to bookstores only by:
Bernhard DeBoer, Inc., 113 E. Center Street, Nutley, N.J. 07110

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ANNOUNCING PAJ'S SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE TO CELEBRATE OUR TENTH ANNIVERSARY

PAJ will publish its 10th anniversary issue—"The American Situation"—on October 15, 1985. The special double issue [PAJ 26/27] will feature more than two dozen contributions by leading theatre people. Controversial issues regarding text interpretation, new trends in theatrical production, the changing profile of avant-garde and Broadway audiences, actor training, the resurgence of opera, theatre criticism, anthropology, and many more topics will be addressed, against the larger background of American cultural politics.

Publication of *Performing Arts Journal* has been made possible in part by public funds received from the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency, and the New York State Council on the Arts.

editorial

The Theatre and Literary Culture

The appearance of David Denby's "Stranger in a Strange Land: A Moviegoer at the Theater" in the January issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* raised the hair on a few heads, but mostly it produced big yawns. In any case, along with the *Endgame* and *L.S.D.* controversies it was something to talk about in a fairly uneventful theatre season.

Here was Denby giving a detailed account of "Theaterphobes"—people who love books, music, and are indifferent to theatre. Last winter and spring, "after a long period of guilty abstinence," he went to a lot of plays and kept a notebook on the revivals, musicals, and dramas, mainly on Broadway, that he saw. The result is a long series of jottings about what's wrong with theatre as a form. But sending a film critic to theatre is like sending a food critic to a sports event. It's all a matter of taste.

What is more remarkable about the publication of Denby's glib, uninformed article in the magazine is why the *Atlantic Monthly* would devote so many pages to theatre. Would it have spent so much space on a thoughtful analysis of important issues in the field, issues that would reverberate in broader areas of the humanities and social sciences for its literate readership. The much larger question is, when was the last time any periodical of quality had any significant discussion of drama, the theatre, or theatre books?

In the April 21, 1985 edition of the *New York Times Book Review* a special section on science and technology books was published. It was keyed to the major front page essay by John Banville on "Physics and Fiction: Order from Chaos," a good, extended reflection on the interchanges between

scientific discovery and writing. For those general readers who don't subscribe to science magazines the *Times* has provided excellent expanded coverage of the world of science, not only in the *Book Review* but in the special science section of a mere few pages which appears regularly on Tuesdays. It has truly added to our knowledge and understanding of the world of science, its accomplishments, ethics, controversies, in highly readable, not the least bit condescending, coverage.

If only there was one day a week when a few pages could be given over to the arts and culture at such a high level. Anywhere in the country. Arts and culture not tied to commerce. And would it be too much to dream that one Sunday we might open the *Book Review* and see the major essay given over to the subject of dramatic literature or criticism—keyed to a special section on important books in the field?

One looks in vain in the major general interest periodicals of this country for thoughtful essays on theatre and its literature. All that exists are theatre reviews, the occasional personality piece, perhaps a review of a new biography, and an overwhelming amount of fluff. Sometimes there is tne put-down piece by a writer, like Denby, who knows almost nothing about theatre. One recent startling event was the front page feature on Liberace's New York engagement in the *New York Times* on April 3, 1985. Even the most ardent theatre, ballet, or opera-goer would not hope for such coverage of his or her beloved artist on the front page of the *Times*. Perhaps, however, there is some deep connection between Liberace's life style, his nine cars, hundreds of pianos, furs, jewels, his house with its Gloria Vanderbilt Room, its Rudolph Valentino Room, and the politics of South Africa, star wars, and the new tax laws.

Recently, the *New York Review of Books* awoke from its general disinterest in theatre books to feature a long, bland essay by one Robert Mazzocco of Sam Shepard's *Motel Chronicles* and several of the plays. Alas, the writer's essay was so incomplete the review did not feature PAJ's two Shepard books, *Hawk Moon* and *American Dreams: The Imagination of Sam Shepard*, nor the, admittedly, very recent *Inner Landscapes: The Theater of Sam Shepard* by Ron Mottram. Was it shoddy scholarship or some form of selective inattention? Mazzocco doesn't seem to have bothered to look in *Books in Print*. Why didn't *NYRB*'s editors correct this oversight? Increasingly, one has the feeling that when it comes to the field of drama book editors in all periodicals simply don't know which books in the field should be reviewed and who is competent to review them.

We in the theatre have become too complacent about writing for the prevailing literary culture to include the literature of theatre in its domain. There is a widespread ignorance of the major theatre texts even among the most well-read literary people, and a distinctive bias against theatre in the literary world. In this country, the knowledge of drama has always been

segregated from the knowledge of fiction and poetry in the study of literature and its theory, as if their commingling with the drama would be impure. It is long past the time that this politics of literary culture should have been articulated.

Those who care about theatre scholarship should no longer accept the regular exclusion of drama and its literature from the pages of literary journals and general interest magazines. People in the theatre should publish more—extended essays on important issues, revisionist theories, historical research, visionary speculations. More care should be taken to see that major books in the field are reviewed and issues aired, and a concerted effort should be made to break through the widespread media bias that excludes volumes of plays from being reviewed.

We must make editors aware of the exclusion of drama from their pages, but this can only be remedied by publicizing the situation, active solicitation of writing assignments, and, in general, a very large effort to take a greater role in generating intelligent discourse on the theatre and its literature. In the long run it will help to revitalize the shrinking field of theatre discourse, bring theatre itself more in step with other currents in contemporary thinking, and perhaps even cause a little movement in the self-satisfied world of literary culture and its canon. It's about time that theatre people stopped being such docile citizens and learned to use their full privileges of representation in literary society.

The Editors

ACTS OF CRITICISM

Bonnie Marranca

The following speech was delivered by Bonnie Marranca on April 15, 1985 on the occasion of receiving the 1983-84 George Jean Nathan Award for Dramatic Criticism for her book Theatrewritings.

I thought that since today is April 15, I might speak of the taxonomy of criticism, and, in particular, what it is I think I'm doing and why I'm doing it. One of the reasons I do what I do, that is, write, is that it is all I have ever done or wanted to do as a way of being in the theatre. I think of it less and less as criticism and more and more as, simply, writing, and perhaps that is why I called my book *Theatrewritings.*

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition there is too much distinction between what is called criticism and what is called writing. I look forward to seeing those borders abolished in a new cosmopolitanism of the pen. With the same stroke, I look forward to seeing advances in the social sciences incorporated into the humanities for a richer, more pluralistic account of the contemporary world and all of its artifacts. Anthropology and literary criticism are beginning to have the same texture of desire.

What is wonderful about writing is its ability to re-imagine worlds in endless possibilities, and what is more remarkable, even dangerous, about theatre

is its ability to demonstrate the potentiality of future worlds in their very possibility of being acted by human beings living now.

Increasingly, what intrigues me is to read the future in works of the past and to read the past in works of the present—simply, to find a way to make writing live in historical and aesthetic time. In Edward Said's graceful phrasing the world, the text, and the critic form an ineluctable trilogy that shapes being in the state of writing. That state also has a politics which is, finally, a matter of taste.

The question before us now is not so much how to make a living in the theatre, but how to make a life in the theatre. Where does theatre, with its obvious identity crisis, fit in the culture, at this time of crisis in contemporary life? Even more to the point, what will theatre do, now that life itself is experienced more and more according to a theatrical paradigm? What is it that will make being in the theatre important to us today?

I just returned last month from 10 weeks of teaching at the University of California in San Diego. During that time I lived near the Pacific Ocean and spent many hours walking along the beach, thinking about these questions. The ocean in front of me was like an endless blank page that my thoughts could never fill up. Consequently, all the writing that I did in this period was in invisible ink. I was only writing in the landscape. Italo Calvino once wrote, "There is no better place to keep a secret than in an unfinished novel." I believe the same can be said of the essay.

Among the ecologies of theatre, I began to think of the promise of culture as horticulture, and myself as a naturalist, so to speak. Theatre appeared as an endangered species. This way of thinking seemed to me to point to an all encompassing humanism that would embrace biological, social, ecological and political issues in the study of an art form in relation to its environment, its culture—in other words, its livingness. In this context, critical writing is not merely an activity but a way of life, an attitude toward living. It is the same verb, to cultivate, that gives definition both to cultivation of the land and of the human body. And sometimes in history knowledge grows on trees.

It is the promise of worldliness that makes writing so powerful a way of being. I love the idea of "worldliness." That is what attracts me to beloved writers such as Anton Chekhov, Marguerite Yourcenar and Hannah Arendt. In fact, it was Arendt who wrote: "Art works clearly are superior to all other things; since they stay longer in the world than anything else, they are the worldliness of things." I used this sentiment as the inscription for my book.

Each of these wonderful writers honors the world in all its objecthood, in all that space and time between its past and its futureness. In their deep and abiding humanism they love the thingness of the world, in all its incom-

prehensible splendor. At times I feel that they exist to help me understand how to live in the world and how to live the life of the world, and perhaps how to write it, or know it cannot be written.

To live life fully is to live it as an act of criticism. Writing is thinking and thought is language, and to choose words is to imagine worlds. One reason to live is to have the luxury to know writing. If all this is beginning to sound a bit mystical, perhaps there is something to that. It was Nietzsche who said: "We have not gotten rid of God because we still believe in grammar."

The language of the stage is only one of the many kinds of writing. There is so much work to be done in the field of theatre writing, especially in these glorious days when scholarship, at its best, is so open to what Bakhtin brilliantly articulated as "the dialogic imagination." Very early on he discovered that there were languages within languages, worlds within words. Later it was Roland Barthes who seduced us with the pleasure of the text.

These are good days for criticism and for theatre, as intellectual pursuits. If once all the arts were said to aspire to music, now it seems that art—and psychoanalysis and politics and sociology and literary theory, not to mention painting and dance—have been drawn to the notion of the theatrical, as a way of understanding human activity.

Of all new languages it is the theatrical vocabulary that has most revitalized American scholarship in the last two decades. But too few theatre people have contributed to the grammar of this startling event.

Those of us who write, should write more often, and more fervently. Not only for ourselves but also to leave new species of writing for those who come after us. Writers are a little like gardeners. They are drawn to the activity of hybridization as a way of generating new forms. They are cultivators of their own and other people's backyards.

Just as we here tonight have fed on the good books of our time, perhaps future generations will be as fortunate to discover the pleasures of worldliness in simple acts of language.

The Director as Thinker

Carmelo Bene's *Otello*

Gautam Dasgupta

Carmelo Bene, actor, dramatist, and director, is the youngest of the triumverate of major theatrical adventurers (the other two are Giorgio Strehler and Dario Fo) who have come to dominate Italian theatre over the past two decades. Although his visibility on American shores has been largely eclipsed by the belated discovery of his two senior colleagues, Bene arrived here much earlier as the imperious Creon in Pasolini's film *Oedipe Re*. Within Italy, and since the early sixties, Bene has occupied a unique position among a wide spectrum of theatregoers and practitioners. Eschewing the overtly political dimension of Fo and the tantalizing theatricalism characteristic of Strehler, he has created a singular brand of dramaturgy that embraces an adolescent love of the poetic visions of Laforgue, Rimbaud, Lautréamont and a more mature coming to terms with theories of literary deconstruction and post-structuralist psychoanalytic thought. Add on to this an energetic infatuation with technology (primarily aural) and there begins to emerge a fairly sharp picture of the bewildering complexities that inform a Carmelo Bene production. Perhaps because of these concerns, he has successfully bridged the gap between young and old, playing to a generational spread of audiences drawn from diverse fields.

Carmelo Bene is an experimentalist, through and through. For him, the stage is only peripherally a place of entertainment. He has the talent and the professional know-how to transfer intelligently, in the tradition of Stein, Chéreau, or Ronconi, dramatic works to the stage. But that is not his forte;

he truly envisions himself as a thinker, a theatrical philosopher engaged in questioning, through the medium of drama and theatre, significant issues of our times. It is all the more remarkable, then, that he has attained such stature within the cultural community of his country.

That his prominence has been abetted by the fundamentally different (and virulently opposite) attitude to "directorship" in Europe—as contrasted with our situation—cannot be denied. Here, the theatrical is viewed as mere window-dressing; what finally counts is the play. There exists an unwritten law that a good play (known under various cognate terms as "stageworthy," "playable," etc.) must, unless the gods and the ghost of "The Method" undermine it, result in the quintessential production. In America, at least, Eric Bentley's exhortation—the playwright as thinker—has sadly degenerated into the playwright as craftsman at best, as entertainer at worst. More often than not, what we have is the playwright as fish in the developmental pool, and what we mean by developmental work is none other than making a play "fit" for production. Which is to say, how to make the directorial task as easy-going as possible. In an oddly circuitous way, all our emphasis on developing playwrights has resulted neither in very adventurous playwriting nor, and this is the more poignant and disastrous result of such inane policy, in the breeding of imaginative directorial talent. I have seen "unstageworthy" plays in Europe attain the status of theatrical art precisely through the mediation of radical directoriality, instances where the intervention of a strong directorial mind and a belief in the autonomy of theatre have not only breathed new life into a play but bracketed it within a *theatrico-philosophical* structure of ideas.

These tangential remarks are but a prolegomena to a broader discussion on what ails the theatre and its culture in America. But it is also an attempt to place in proper perspective the *Otello/Secondo* of Carmelo Bene, which I recently saw at the Teatro della Pergola in Florence. This production is a revised, second edition of an earlier *Otello* staged in 1979. In its radical surgery on Shakespeare's text and narrative development, it continues the tradition of his earlier experiments with *Hamlet* (titled *One Hamlet Less*), *Romeo and Juliet*, and Marlowe's *Edward II*.

In the current version, Bene has pared down the action of *Othello*, but not to such a scale that we lose sight of the play's narrative strategy. He has appreciably reduced the number of characters to the relevant eight, dressed them all in uniformly white robes, and placed them atop a giant bed sheeted in white. The actors appear to be dusted in white powder, lending them an aura of Pierrot-like figures who move about in awkwardly pantomimic gesturation. This is further accentuated by the tableaux-like compositions which they assume as the evening progresses. Bene, as Othello, retains shades of black although no illusionistic effort is employed to make it seem that he is a darkened Moor. The visual image of Bene as Othello, part black, part white, sets the stage for one of the many confrontations in the play.

This initial subversive ploy addresses themes of miscegenation that add a pointed relevance to the work, a theme that gains in intensity as it later becomes obvious that the Iago of this production is a black actor in white face.

Of course, it would be simplistic to say that Bene's production uses such theatrical devises to underscore ideas about racism. What it does accomplish, however, is to undermine the primacy of psychological characterization through acts of theatrical intervention. Absence of characterization leads to the presence of ideas. Not *any* ideas, but concepts that derive from the thematics of the play. What occurs finally on stage is a complex attempt at understanding the nature of jealous conflict, the ascendancy of male camaraderie and eventual consolidation of power at the expense of female presence that manifests itself at the edges of existence, and the obsessive nature of thinking itself, of thought's presence in a hall of mirrors.

That this is Bene's revised *Otello* is a manifestation of theatrical thought, thought anew by its creator. But thought itself serves as a cocoon that enwraps this production of *Otello*. The characters, denuded partially of their individual traits, play out the thematics of jealousy along the periphery of the plot's narrative line. Jealousy by nature posits a relationship to the Other (one cannot be jealous of oneself). In fact, it is further determined by a possessive relationship—a sublimation on the psychological plane of a capitalistic relationship of ownership, a study in "exchange value" that devolves (as Guattari and Deleuze have pointed out) into the schizoid personality. It is this dyadic and fluid structure that informs Bene's production of *Otello*. Fracturing becomes the operational mode of his production, evident also in the androgynous aura that surrounds all the figures on stage. Swathed in abundantly flowing robes, chalk-faced and lit with strident sidelighting, a deliberate neutrality effaces gender distinctions to a bewildering pitch.

The notion of the other (even as the Unconscious within the self) circumscribes all relationships in this production. To exist is to be disclosed in the presence of the other—to be desired by the other or to exercise desire to disclose the self—the *alethia* of the Greeks. (Shakespeare's play abounds with imageries of enchantment, dream, seduction, and desire.) Such disclosures ground themselves in *Otello* in a ceaseless activity of play. Hoping to concretize their selves, to lend themselves identity, the characters are forced to confront this other, but in so doing always fall into the abyss of infinite play. In a perversely erotic segment, a robe falls off Desdemona's shoulders exposing her breasts. Two dark hands cup her breasts from behind, but the head that arises from behind her is Iago, followed in succession by Cassio, Emilia, and Bianca. The scene could be read in infinite permutations, but in the final analysis it is framed by two extremes: is it Othello's jealous fantasy gone to its limits or is it Desdemona's

fantasy of all-encompassing love played out to its fullest? To comprehend jealousy is to understand the nature of love, and to know love is to know all that jealousy entails. Within this circularity is subsumed the impossibility of univocal knowing; all that is left is to engage in play, in the being-present on stage, bounded by the parameters of language, visual and ultimately theatrical systems. When, finally, Iago is here revealed as a black actor, it once again evokes the circularity of a theatrically-black Othello confronted by a theatrically-white Iago which soon dissolves into a white actor playing Othello now facing at the end of the play a black actor playing Iago. In fact, as the play progresses, all the actors gradually shed their flour make-up to stand as their untheatrical selves, as icons of neutrality. They all have played out their confrontation with the other.

Aiding in this neutrality is the heavily amplified aural element employed in the production. Three strategically placed microphones on stage (no body mikes) determine the blocking pattern of most of the movements. On occassion lines are delivered at a distance from the microphones, their relative quiet only to be shattered by the sudden sonic booms that erupt from two gigantic speakers placed in the auditorium. At such instances it is almost impossible to know for sure who is speaking; language takes on its own autonomy and dialogue becomes rhetoric. This rupture of the speech-act and literary language mirrors the other multiple ruptures that pervade the production. What Bene seems to suggest through this technological device, with a nod to deconstructive theory, is the fact of language preceding Being, of language injecting absence into the world. As the voice bombarded the audience, the stage picture retreated into a spectral frame, identities became blurred, leaving in its wake a trace generated by schisms of language grounding presence (or questioning once again the Heideggerian dilemma).

On a contextual level, of course, the escalation of sound levels points up what I felt was an ingenious evocation of a crucial thematic element in the play. If *Oedipus* is about the act of seeing (and blindness), *Othello* is surely the first great play which supplants the primacy of the visual with the aural. Othello first *hears* about Desdemona's betrayal, a thought generated by speech that continues to resound and echo in his mind. He even refuses to witness, despite Iago's repeated overtures, scenes of deception. It is enough that he has heard. Destiny, for Othello, is set into motion by language; and it is language which dominates the spirit of Bene's *Othello*.

This same emphasis on language and voice, viewed as a progenitor of a vital metaphysics, recalls in Bene's staging the spirit of Pirandello, late Brecht and Beckett. The actors, who must move within the proximity of the stationary microphones, are trapped by theatrical props. To lend presence to their theatrical beings, they must search out the instrumentation through which their presence will be made manifest. But as soon as they do so, the actor's being is rendered absent and language takes precedence, which

through its pervasive mechanism of signification ruptures the organicity of reality, of existence. This is the dialectic that informs and circumscribes the drama of the three great philosophers of recent dramaturgy. (Even the rupture itself, in Bene's staging, is given aural prominence. Intermittently, a monstrous and painfully amplified tear of linen rends the quiet of the auditorium. Actors rip through pieces of cloth from the bedsheet that suggests the lost handkerchief of the play, and the only other scenic prop of the production, a cyclorama, is comprised of stitched-together pieces of linen that could represent a giant sail or a massive tent for the Cyprus episodes or a blank white page awaiting the renewed text of this production.)

Obviously, Carmelo Bene's *Otello* is not for purists or the faint-hearted. In its indebtedness to broader expressions of intellectual concerns, to psychology, philosophy, and literary theory, it does offer up a theatre of thought. Here we have a director as thinker and a theatrical production that speaks to the thinking mind. It engages thought by zeroing in on the center by acts of subversion carried out at the limits of thought. That the center itself can never be reached is of no concern to Bene; it is enough that he strives valiantly in this futile quest to lend meaning to the active (and forever deferred) modality of thought as erupting in the conflagration of two theatrical minds—Shakespeare and Carmelo Bene.

MILAN AND HIS MASTER

Gerald Rabkin

"I am not composing, I am not an author; I am reading or conversing, questioning or answering."

—Diderot, "Essay on the Reigns of Claudius and Nero"

"Love is a constant interrogation."

—Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*

"The theatrical is the domain of liberty, the place where identities are only roles and one can change roles, a zone where meaning itself may be refused."

—Sontag, "On Roland Barthes"

Who are here met?

A French *philosophe* long dead, an exiled Czech novelist, an American critic-writer-filmmaker turned theatre director. Masters, all.

The place? The American Repertory Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

The occasion? The American premiere, directed by Susan Sontag, of *Jacques and His Master*, Milan Kundera's dramatic "variation" on the most puzzling work of the Enlightenment, Diderot's novel—or anti-novel —*Jacques le fataliste et son maître.*

An event indeed in the wasteland of the past theatre season, but was it a felicitous meeting? The Literary Critic was sure it was, but the Theatre Critic had his doubts.

The Literary Critic: A perfect melding of sensibilities, and a powerful demonstration of such contemporary critical principles as intertextuality, equivocality, and the death of the author. Diderot's fascinating work of the literary imagination, which historically never received its proper due because of its formal radicalism, can now be seen to anticipate the questions which preoccupy the postmodern critical temperment: the unreliability of language, the ubiquity of textuality, the problematic status of causality, the intersection of eros and power.

The Theatre Critic: Slow down. Less theory, more description, please.

LC: I'll try. Diderot's work, published posthumously in 1796, is indeed a Chinese puzzle: a novel that denies it is a novel, that expresses itself almost entirely through dialogue. A work of stories within stories, voices interrupting voices. First, there is the authorial voice speaking directly to the reader, occasionally omniscient, at other times self-effacing, or bullying, or ignorant of what it records. The voice of the creator segues into that of the scribe who records and the editor who selects, not to mention the critic who analyzes the rhetoric of fiction. And this dominant framing dialogue of author and reader is intersected by other dialogues, preeminently that of Jacques and his master as they travel on their indeterminate journey telling each other amorous stories which they constantly interrupt. And they in turn are interrupted by the author and by other story-telling characters. Indeed, no objective source of discourse is left intact. This book, with its anatomizing of codes of writing, its equivocality—

TC: There you go again. What may be radical for the novel with its usually singular narrative voice is hardly radical for the drama where discourse is fragmented, polyphonic, by definition. If it's innovation we're looking for, the question is whether or not Kundera has succeeded in finding dramatic equivalences for Diderot's daring narrative strategies. I'm not so sure he has: paradoxically, as a contemporary play—with all the legacy of modernist theatre experiment behind it—Kundera's *Jacques* seems far less radical a work than its unclassifiable progenitor two centuries ago.

LC: But Kundera is hardly unaware of the problem. He knows that he cannot "adapt" *Jacques*, for to adapt is to reduce, ultimately to betray, particularly in the case of so monumentally original a work as Diderot's. Nor is Kundera unaware of the formal difference between fiction and drama. He *does* attempt to recreate the radical polyphony of the original within the dialogic form of drama by several strategies, chiefly a tripartite structure which frames the central narrative of Mme de La Pommeraye's attempted revenge against her faithless lover with the intersected, contrapuntal tales of Jac-

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ques and his Master's ironic amours. But he is not creating "equivalences." This play must be judged an original work, indeed an homage to Diderot, but one suffused with Kundera's own preoccupations.

TC: I accept the intent, but I'm not sure the "variation" is as intertextual—as you call it—as you suggest. I've looked at Diderot, and Kundera's interventions seem thematically minor, literally reductive of their original source. I'm not saying this with deprecation, for I don't share Kundera's disdain for adaptation. But despite a few original references (to "too many masters," for example) and shifts of emphasis (Jacques, not the Hostess narrates the pardon of the prostitute-wife in the Pommeraye tale, thus rendering more ambiguous the failure of the Marquise's revenge), almost all the narrative material in the play and indeed some of its dialogue is culled from Diderot. To claim the work as "original" what is needed is more of Kundera's distinctive voice of laughter and forgetting.

LC: Isn't it there in Kundera's final resonant evocation of the steadfastness that must undergird exile—"forward is anywhere"? But why preempt the power of his esteemed source when there is no need? Kundera cherishes

Diderot's sensibility not because of the principle of authority which he rejects, but because it so accords with his own. Now resident in Paris, Kundera clearly sees himself as the heir of an endangered Enlightenment. He accepts its values of rationality and irony, particularly as embodied in Diderot, the *philosophe* most equivocal concerning the idea of progress. The polarity between free will and determinism in Diderot's ironic treatment of Jacques's reiterated "*ecrit la-haut*"—written on high—is paralleled by Kundera's own vision of reality as governed by pairs of opposites: Soul/Body, Memory/Forgetting, Eros/Laughter, Scepticism/Nostalgia, Fanaticism/Nihilism, and the qualities Weight/Lightness as metaphorical expression of the conflict between absolute meaning and absolute disbelief. Kundera drops "le fataliste" from the title of his variation on Diderot, but he accepts the work's deterministic equivocality: despite his constant evocation of the power of fate, Jacques acts autonomously when supposedly unable to do so. But if at any given moment in the novel Jacques seems undetermined, at the heart of the book is the fear that life is merely a confluence of blind forces that man dominates only in his illusions. It is a fear Kundera shares and he has no desire to tamper with Diderot's articulation. And in what arena is the illusion of human autonomy greatest in both Diderot and Kundera? The erotic. The eighteenth-century author of the Encyclopedia article on "Jouissance" and the twentieth-century observer of *Laughable Loves* meet in the transhistorical realm of sexuality, in the eyes of both the freest of human pursuits but also the most determined and illusory.

TC: All this is very interesting, but is it on the point? The history of the stage is littered with the wrecks of "shared sensibilities." Indeed, the distinctive power of theatre emerges from its collaborative—that is to say, its *dialectical*—nature, its synthesis of often opposed interpretative sensibilities. The question surely is *not* whether the encounter with Diderot was a happy one for Kundera, but whether that meeting was a happy one for the audience. And here we must not forget the third person in this encounter, Susan Sontag, the director—

LC: Who is also perfectly attuned to the theatrical encounter, since she shares the French sensibility which refuses to accept the absurd boundaries in the Anglo-American tradition that rigidly demarcate artistic genres and roles.

TC: I bow to none in my admiration of Ms. Sontag's creative versatility and refusal to be pigeon-holed. But here her undeniable intelligence must articulate itself in theatrical terms. The directorial job she has undertaken demands the primary ability to make the abstract concrete. I have no doubt, given her critical acumen, that she had a firm conceptual model in her mind as she mounted the play. But this model remains elusive because it is not projected physically. There are images here which suggest contradictory conceptual models, and this play—with its fragmented and intersecting

narratives—desperately needs the forward surge of a strong theatrical reading. It also needs the contrasting energy of precisely detailed performance. Neither, alas, does Ms. Sontag help provide.

LC: Wait a moment. First you locate the deficiency of this production in Kundera's anemic version of Diderot's remarkable book. Now you shift the blame to Ms. Sontag's anemic directing.

TC: No contradiction, I fear. Both Kundera and Sontag fail to connect with the vitality of the experimental dramatic and theatrical tradition. Kundera states in his Introduction to the published version of his play that dramatic form is more rigid than that of the novel, that the "theatre has never had its Laurence Sterne" to liberate it formally. True, dramatic form is shaped by the constraints of live performance, but has Kundera no memory of the formal radicalism of Strindberg and Pirandello? Diderot works in acknowledged indebtedness to *his* artistic forbears: Rabelais, Cervantes, Sterne. But Kundera disregards the tradition of dramatic experiment in our century. Where Diderot's novel remains formally audacious, Kundera's play is orderly, spare, neo-classical, with lip service to obvious illusion-breaking conventions ("You forget we're on stage. You can't have horses on stage").

LC: And why not neo-classical for a work set in the eighteenth century?

TC: But Kundera is not playing with eighteenth-century theatre conventions; he pointedly notes that the action in his play takes place in an eighteenth century of the mind. And he specifically advises against reproducing the settings and costumes of the period. For, to him, Diderot "creates a space never before seen in the history of the novel: a stage wihout scenery . . . the most radical rejection of realistic illusion." Isn't Kundera here rejecting another important element in *Jacques le fataliste*, its debt—despite narrative experimentation—to the realist tradition? Didn't Diderot write: "Tell me the facts, reproduce faithfully the conversation and I will soon find out the soul of the man I have to deal with"?

LC: You can't have it both ways. First you say Kundera isn't sufficiently experimental; now you say he's insufficiently realistic. Well, *Jacques and His Master* can be anything it wants: it's Kundera's play. Its key theatrical metaphor is the bare stage—"the stage is as bare as the world and the world as bare as an empty stage," a metaphor, I admit, Ms. Sontag does not follow productionally. The play *does* connect with the contemporary dramatic tradition of Absurdism: its Beckettian echoes are clear. It is further suffused with a mordancy born of Kundera's personal experience of exile: "History enjoys a good laugh." This is a more considerable play that you acknowledge.

TC: Perhaps—I'd indeed like to see it in another production. But, if a bare stage should indeed be its metaphor, can we agree that this production is

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no help? I do not accept the proposition that a director *must* follow a playwright's suggestions; Ms. Sontag has the interpretative right *not* to set the play on a bare stage and to make the costumes more literally accurate than Kundera suggests. But—the important question—to what theoretical end? Why a set which ignores Appia's primary injunction that a setting *affirm* the actor's dynamic presence, not overwhelm him? This ponderous styrofoam version of a Piranesi engraving of a Roman ruin is decorative rather than functional. And the one vital scenic element—the elevated platform that serves as the playing area for the plays-within-the-play is insufficiently differentiated from the main stage. As director, Sontag—more than designer Douglas Stein—must take the major blame, for there is an indecisiveness displayed here which infects all the theatrical collaborators and imparts a uniform blandness. Ironically, the problem with this production is the problem with Diderot's own plays, in which, unlike *Jacques*, all the characters speak with the same voice.

LC: Well, I feel Sontag *has* found a style, even if it isn't to your liking. The setting affirms the Derridean notion of *traces*, the sedimentations of historic eras, and what seems like a uniform style of performance makes the semiotic point that a play is a language system that shapes what we call "characters" and "actions." As one of your favorites, Richard Foreman, noted: "We start talking and the language takes over." Perhaps with her own homage to Robert Bresson (whose *Les Dames du bois de Boulogne* was based on the tale of Mme de La Pommeraye's revenge) Sontag con-

sciously de-emotionalizes the performance to shift the focus from facile identification to the mystification of discourse.

TC: But Foreman and Bresson have developed distinctive theatrical and cinematic languages to animate their theoretical preoccupations. I don't feel Sontag here demonstrates similar control. Why, for example, is Elizabeth Swados's music used for mere punctuation, banal illustration of the literal meaning of lines? If the governing style is Bressonian deadpan, why this musical underlining?

(*Here an actor interrupts.*) The Actor: You've both been pretty abstract. What bothered *me* was that the production was so lacking in performance vitality. Although the ART actors are a competent bunch of professionals, they didn't seem to know what was expected of them. Jacques, his Master, and the Innkeeper are strong roles, but the actors—even the redoubtable Priscilla Smith—seemed stylistically insecure. Why was Smith's lower-class Innkeeper played exactly the same as her upper-class Marquise? Was Sontag making a conscious point, or was it an oversight? The actors' *actions* and *objectives*—forgive my method terminology—were unclear, and one scene ran into another without pacing or shaping, with predictably unfortunate results. Particularly unfortunate when the play's different narrative levels offer so many opportunities for differentiation and variety. Let me ask you both—do you *care* about what happens in Diderot's many stories in his novel? I mean, are they good stories?

LC & TC: Absolutely.

The Actor: Then why has this production so little narrative energy? I couldn't care less whether or not Jacques and his Master finished the stories of their loves. And one other question about the production as a whole: If, as you report, Diderot's novel is dominated by two framing conversations—one between Jacques and his Master and one between the Author and the Reader—couldn't the director have played with performance conventions to reproduce the latter relationship?

TC: That was Kundera's primary responsibility, not Sontag's. Yes, he could have striven for some equivalence to that level of discourse in Diderot. Apparently, a dramatic adaptation of the novel in Paris in the sixties did indeed introduce Diderot as a character on stage, arguing and conversing with the actors, director, audience. Here we have only an inanimate bust of the great man and Jacques' few asides to the audience. But you raise a very valid point: Sontag could surely have done more with the conventions of performance. Since the sixties, the instability and transmutations of character, the juxtaposition of performance styles have become part of the experimental theatre vocabulary. A play like *Jacques and His Master* desperately needs the imprint of a strong theatrical imagination. What would a Foreman have done with it, or a Breuer, or a Vaccaro?

LC: Well, I'm outnumbered. I still maintain this was an important theatrical event, or why else would we be going on so long about it? We can agree to disagree about its productional "success"—but, then, you theatre people are obsessed with instant success or failure. In my broader view, I'm overjoyed by a meeting of such high intelligence in a medium so resistant to seriousness. All praise to the ART for this important occasion—and for the others that accompanied it this season: Serban's charming *King Stag* and Akalaitis's controversial *Endgame,* which, I believe, you have some considered thoughts about?

TC: We've gone on long enough. I'll save it for another day. Well, shall we go?

The Literary Critic & The Actor: Yes, let's go.

(*They do not move.*)

Gerald Rabkin is a contributing editor of Performing Arts Journal.

Milan Kundera

interviewed by Arthur Holmberg

Primarily you are a novelist. Why did you turn to theatre?

Jacques and His Master is a *piece de circonstance.* In 1971, after the fall of Dubcek, the new regime looked on me with wary eyes. My books were banned, and I was stripped of all legal means of earning a living. A friend who directed a theatre suggested I write a play for his troupe using a pseudonym. So Jacques saw the light of day due to dire economic straits. But in addition to external circumstances, I was tempted by the call of adventure. I had never written a play before, so I wanted to try my hand creating a work that would take me, its author, by surprise.

Does the drama as a genre offer you strategies of expression not found in fiction?

The playfulness inherent in theatrical expression appealed to me. The theatre is a game, and playing games is an important source of pleasure. Real life is linked to a series of deceptions. It disappoints us with its futility. But when we consciously play games, as on stage, we already know that the game isn't serious. Thus, the tragic futility of life becomes the joyous futility of play. In totalitarian regimes one quickly learns the importance of humor. You learn to trust or mistrust people because of the way they laugh. The modern world frightens me because it's rapidly losing its sense of the playfulness of play.

Why Diderot? Why dramatize Jacques le fataliste?

The friend who commissioned the play wanted a dramatization of a novel.

In fact, he tried to shove Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* down my throat, but Dostoyevsky nauseated me, not only because Russian tanks had occupied my country, but also because of his streak of sentimental melodrama. I wanted to get as far away as possible from the bombastic Russian soul, I longed to take refuge in the smile of reason of French classicism.

Jacques le fataliste is one of my favorite novels—it's one of the few important novels constructed on the principle of play as play. It achieves greatness by refusing to be serious. The novel dramatizes the terminal paradoxes that ushered out the Enlightenment. Diderot was one of the first to explore the tragi-comic split between human intentions and human acts. The results of what we do get out of hand, and the rippling out effects of seemingly insignificant gestures often form a noose around our necks. After Diderot, novelists could no longer look on action and plot in quite the same way. Diderot knew that paradox is the basic law of human life.

But my play is not so much an adaptation of Diderot's novel as a dialogue across two centuries with its author—a confrontation between the eighteenth and twentieth centuries. Diderot looked on the future as infinite space to be filled with unlimited progress. We look to the future with fear and distrust. If Diderot can see my play from the other side of the tomb, he may not agree with me, but if he takes into account everything our century has seen, I don't think my play would anger him. He would understand why we've lost faith in man.

What do you like best about your play?

The monologue about bad poets and bad poetry. Diderot gave me the beginning of this speech, but elaborated on it and the end is pure Kundera. Nobody reads novels anymore, but everybody—at least in France—is writing one.

Will you write any more plays?

No. Never. *Jacques* was my first and last. I find that as I grow older I want to concentrate more and more intensely on my specialty—the novel. I want to learn as much as I can about *its* possibilities. I want to explore *its* secrets. When I was a young man my attention was more dispersed; the cinema, the theatre attracted me much more than today. Now I'm quite content to sit in an easy chair and read a novel.

I think I've also lost interest in the theatre because of the productions I see around me in Paris. They're loud and tawdry and worthless. You'll see what I mean when you go to Strehler's *L'Illusion*. Listening to actors scream bores me. So I virtually stopped caring about theatre after I moved to France. It always left me so disheartened. The theatre I liked took place in those small pocket theatres of Prague in a black room where two or three actors would

create magic with almost no props or scenery. Out of a void they would bring forth life. But that Prague no longer exists, and here in Paris there's no point in going to the theatre.

Susan Sontag

interviewed by Arthur Holmberg

What are the main differences between Kundera's play and Diderot's novel?

The emotional balance is different. Kundera's play is sadder—the ebullience of Diderot filtered through a Central European melancholy. Kundera turns a rambunctious, picaresque novel into a ghost sonata about the *ancien regime*. Kundera is more skeptical about human relations and the possibility of pleasure. The range of human options has shrunk. A sense of *lacrimae rerum* pervades his play. Diderot lived before the revolution. Kundera lives after the revolution has failed. So you have a clash between pre-revolutionary hope and post-revolutionary sorrow. The end of the play can be read as a political reference. The stage directions of Kundera force the issue. Forward, without enthusiasm, into a glorious future we now know isn't going to be glorious at all. Kundera imposes this pathos on Diderot's full-blooded material.

The play is a portrait *in extremis* of the odd couple that ranges in literature from Don Quixote and Sancho Panza to Hamm and Clov—the eccentric, helpless master and the indulgent, clever servant. But the servant has no desire to leave. Kundera, in fact, reinforces the social implications of the mutual dependence of the master/slave bond.

What I find difficult in staging the play are the roles Kundera writes for women. With the exception of the Innkeeper/Marquise the other female parts are little more than caricatures, and the actresses and I have to work hard to try to give them some presence.

Jacques *is the second play you've directed. The first—Pirandello's* As You

Desire Me—*took place in Italy. What are the main differences between working with American and European actors?*

Whereas European actors tend to be more cultivated than Americans—they have a large frame of reference from literature and art to draw on—Americans tend to be more intellectual. Therefore, the process of working is quite different. It's more democratic here. American actors love to do improvisations. This rehearsal process makes Europeans uneasy. Europeans, by and large, view the theatre as a director's medium and do what they're told without quibble or comment. Americans, on the other hand, are always formulating questions based on detailed and precise critical readings of the text. They're obsessed with the whys and wherefores. I keep saying, "let's go back to the blocking," and they want to talk about the theory of the play. That's unlikely in Europe. Italian actors are very different from American actors. They use everything differently. The body language varies greatly between the two cultures. And working with *Jacques*, a modernist, self-reflecting drama—I realized again what a central presence Pirandello is in the theatre. He is the single most influential playwright of the twentieth century. He was the last of the great playwrights of bourgeois intellection. He raised the private agonies of the drawing room to a metaphysical pitch.

I find the way you choreograph the actors' movements through space extremely potent. It's been five years since I saw your Pirandello, but I can still see in my mind's eye the fluid patterns you created on stage. How did this plaisir du plastique *enter your work?*

My hero is George Balanchine. I attend ballet regularly, and by watching his work I learned a great deal about what real stagecraft is. Acting is physical work. A good part of the director's task is to teach actors how the foot and mouth connect—how the mouth can say these particular words while the feet move in that particular direction, without tripping over furniture. And once foot and mouth get connected, it's hard to disconnect them. I found this out with the Pirandello. Right before opening I decided to change some blocking. Suddenly foot and mouth no longer connected and the actors were either bumbling over the lines or stumbling over their feet.

You've directed four movies as well. What are the main differences you've found between your role as a director of film and of theatre?

Film really is a director's medium. The final product is constructed in an editing room and can look very different from what the actors did on the set. The theatre belongs to actors. After a play opens, the director disappears, but the actors go on living with the play night after night. Changes creep in. I remember how different *As You Desire Me* looked at the end of its run. A play is never the same on any two nights. Once you finish a film, it stays finished. And one constructs stage pictures completely differently from

movie sets, which one sees in bits and pieces.

What appeals to you most about theatre as a genre?

What I cherish in the theatre are those dazzling visual images the stage can generate that rattle inside your head for ever.

And the human contact in the theatre is intense. Underneath all the banter of this play, I hope it communicates Kundera's anguish and sorrow. I want it to tug at the heart. I'm happiest in the theatre when I cry. The theatre liberates. It frees our deepest feelings.

Arthur Holmberg is a contributing editor of Performing Arts Journal.

Beyond Perspective:

Scenic Space in New Italian Theatre

Antonio Attisani

In the seventies, thousands of people began to work in the theatre, for widely different motives, a circumstance which brought about an overabundance of goods in the marketplace. One of the effects of the social movements and cultural politics of the period was to create a temporary and artificial audience. So, even the Italian theatre experienced inflation.

The last few theatrical seasons, however, have seen the beginning of a new phase. A superficial and hurried analysis points to a decreased demand for a persistent output, the necessity to return to pre-1970 production levels, and a return to tradition—as if today's audience were that of a decade ago. The scene has changed very much, yet the necessary and painful reconstruction is not a unanimous sign of a return to conformity. Instead, the theatre must face up to its diminished position (reduced spectacle in a society based on spectacle) and look for its new specific character in the world of electronics.

In the last decade, an irreversibly new factor has emerged, even in Italian theatre: the groups. There have been hundreds. Now there are ten or so and among them are some who have achieved a very high level of work, in some cases, with a certain amount of international recognition, while others are not yet as known as they deserve to be.

What is needed today is not so much a defense of groups; many have already been recognized and have survived without institutional help, and

their continued existence is no longer in doubt. It is more important to understand the ways in which a cultural creativity manifests itself, and to work for a climate which will nurture such manifestations.

After following the discussion in PAJ 22 on BAM's Next Wave [1983], it seems to me that the problem has arisen in an analogous way in every country. Festivals and other cultural "macro-institutions" are far from the original production spaces. They limit themselves to involving only those who have already won themselves a role, each time inventing anew the criteria for choice and promotion—in the case of the BAM festival, a somewhat artificial "interdisciplinarity"—destined to make those events seem heralds of the new instead of what they really are, creators of common spaces, for better or for worse. I believe that we don't have to opt for one of the two production methods but that we must clarify at both the theoretical and practical levels, their different, reciprocal functions.

Groups, large and small, along with the many individual artists, are not the only positive new feature of the recent Italian theatre, but they are certainly the least known. Perhaps this is because they don't appear to be a trend. In fact they signal the end of trends and movements: every "important" group is the leader of a non-existent school and every piece of work achieves its own debt-free uniqueness. [See "Benvenuto: New York-Italy," PAJ 24.]

This change is concrete, that is, it anticipates theoretical formulas and demands a different reading and interpretation than the theatre we were accustomed to in the past. If labels such as "Third Theatre" or "Post Avant-garde" have failed, showing themselves to be honest but outmoded exercises of power on the part of the militant critics, and if likewise any such attempt to extrapolate trends from a phenomenon so heterogeneous is bound to fail, one might ask what criteria one can use to judge such theatres. Is there a particular language in which they express themselves? Is there something which links groups such as the Teatro della Valdoca to Gaia Scienza, Krypton to Santagata & Morganti, Padiglione Italya to Studio 3?

One thing makes them part of the essence of theatre: the acceptance of that invariable that is the stage. In truth, the presentation of a here and now by means of that inversion which transforms the many into one (the public) and the one (the actor) into many. There is something which distinguishes these groups from the mainstream: the understanding that they live at the end of a cycle (cultural *and* theatrical), the search for other dimensions. Still theatre, then, still stage, but as in every moment of change, a different "scenery," a different definition and organization of the performance space.

In modern Western culture, the theatre is housed in the city, which is the place of living together and of exchange *par excellence*. Almost all of the theatre which we know accepts this idea and even when it removes itself

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from the center, it is in order to say that history and crises are those of urban life. Today this hegemony is crumbling as a result of a process of internal fission. We are experiencing simultaneously the crisis of the city and the city as the inescapable place of the crisis; modern communication processes and the diffusion of urbanization have annihilated the structure and characteristics of the metropolis, so that "a different place" ceases to exist; everything is the same.

Recent studies have shown that some Renaissance city projects had been mistakenly identified as theatre design projects, and that perspective scenery does not derive from urban perspective. Although such scenery follows the urban perspective, it only adopts it through a very different ideological process. Certainly, the encounter between city and theatre is the fundamental motif of the model: on the stage the city is a new place of exchange and behavior models; and the theatre is in the city. In effect, when the city *had to exist*, its various aspects became a composite on the stage, the city was the set. Today, stage design understood as *textual element* remains as a function of the stageability of the modern repertoire: a stage design as a component of the *scenic script* is a value of the urban avant-garde, and of a theatre which models itself on the modern. Theatre reflects its particular cultural position in the uncensored organization of the scenic space.

What does it mean today to affirm that many groups have *gone beyond stage design*? Precisely, that theatre groups, each in its own way, are working on a restoration of the performance space. In order to achieve this, the group must recover theatrical vision from the entropy of habitual consumption, above all, from its dependence on a perspective of *non-realistic* (illusionary) values. Therefore, they are not "against" anyone, not even against scenic designers. They simply must pay the price of an uncensored conscience, with all the pains and joys that derive from it.

Krypton, for instance, works with the idea of an electronic script. This is how the procedure works as applied to Virgil's *Eneide*. Seven cantos were chosen, which became seven vignettes, seven movements: the tempest and the landing on the Libyan shores; the vision of Carthage; Aeneas's tale of the burning of Troy; the love tryst between Aeneas and Dido; the Sybil's prophecy; the voyage; the final battle at Troy. The piece is made almost entirely at the drawing-table. The director works at the same time, but separately, on text, choreography, music, and images. Each one of these aspects has its own author. Alfredo Pirri worked on the images, selecting first of all the rhetorical images to be expressed. Then, he embarked upon the interpretation of their internal form, dismembering them and intervening with his own inventions of new signs and montages. Finally, he produced about two hundred drawings which were fed into a computer capable of programming several thousand projections. The final use of the films is worked out by the director once the first drafts of each individual section converge. At that point a semi-definitive script can be put together. During the last rehearsals

FALSO MOVIMENTO [*OTELLO*]

Cesare Accetta

(which last only a few days, due to the very high cost of the rented equipment) the general programming of the computer which controls all the electronic messages is established. However, the director and the lighting technician will always be at the console and are always able to intervene during the running of the show, continuing, if they wish to feed the variations into the computer memory.

This operation is not without risks: too much of this technological graphics could reduce the actors to pure choreographic decorations. However, this search for an "unrecorded" poetics for the stage is rich in internal emotions, offering an essay of electronic writing for the stage, irreversibly different from that achieved by video. It is only an apparent paradox that a theatre fully equipped in the Italian style should be the ideal site for a performance space which has nothing to do with the genres that normally inhabit it.

La Gaia Scienza has achieved great success with its *Cuori strappati (Torn Hearts),* a piece that operates as a sort of montage of attractions, or as an anthology of the results of the research done by the group in the last few years. Here the performance space represents a kind of cultural archetype: it could not be imagined beforehand and then built, but could only be dreamed, imagined, and lived by the actors during the long rehearsal period. It began with bits and pieces of designs for the set which were represented on a scale model. Simultaneously, the set designer worked with the group, with the carpenter, and with the graphic computer programmer. Each one of them suggested different possibilities for the transformation of the space (the set designer and the lighting designer); the computer then proposed infinite ways of composing the various pieces that make up the set. But only a couple of options were actually used; the other movements, the other expressions of this sort of little seaside village square derive from the collaborative efforts of technicians and actors who co-author the piece (there is no acknowledged director). In this case, the type of work done in designing the performance space continues with updated technology and the new role of the actor, the plastic conception of set design born with Futurism.

Lo spazio della quiete (The Space of Quiet) of Teatro della Valdoca was born in a dark womb. The starting point of the group, formed by three ex-architects and painters, is a space reduced to zero, emptiness. The place becomes space through a process related to the *ora et labora* (pray and work) rule of the Benedictines: meditation, production, experimentation. *Lo spazio della quiete* is an adventure in perception; it is an emotionally stirring spectacle because from the nothingness, everything that develops becomes a startling happening. The piece begins with a static relationship between two women. Their stares take on a certain measurable consistency. The lights reveal their function by degree, discreetly; objects enter slowly into the field of vision. The space begins to breathe with the emotion

TEATRO DELLA VALDOCA

of the conquered movement, through a series of Zen-like meditative postures, inspired perhaps by Giotto or Piero della Francesca. An hour of silent performance with only a fragment of Bach's "Art of the Fugue" entering finally, to suggest the conjunction between the concrete in art and the art of the concrete. Towards the end all is possible, because the miracle is realized by the piece: a woman can gather the light; a body can lay in the heaviness of death and be reborn; the stars come out and a tongue of flame leaps across the sky. No technological intimidation underlies these effects; indeed, at the end, the two women rediscover a humble "gloria" of the body, in the pleasure of having allowed themselves to be seen.

Here, too, we are well beyond set design, in a mental space of an almost mystical quality whose originality is based not in an intentional surpassing of conventional models, nor in the adoption of any type of decorative purpose. Rather, it is space conquered, glorious space.

Doing theatre in a contemporary mode, and in search of poetical truth, is what motivates the groups discussed here. The different concept of the performance space is only one possible example of the structural shift from the theatre of the modern and the avant-garde of the past decade; others

KRYPTON [*ENEIDE*]

could be cited, yet without arriving at a definition of these new theatres as a movement. The impossibility of formalizing certain tendencies denies the groups any protective net of theory; everything rests on the outcome of the work itself, on productions rather than on formulas. In this sense, the Italian theatre is without a doubt, at one of the highest points of what is an international ferment. No one need feel embarrassed if the keepers of "tradition" don't realize what is afoot. The adventure is taking place all the same, without them.

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JEAN GENET

The Intellectual As Guerrilla

In September 1982 Genet travelled to Beirut. One day after the massacre by the Christian Falangist militia, he managed to spend a few hours in the camp of Chattila. He published his first report under the title "4 Hours in Chattila." Thirteen years earlier, between October 1970 and April 1971, Genet had been invited by the PLO at which time he visited Palestinian camps and military bases on the Syrian-Jordanian border.

What was it that compelled you to commit yourself so strongly to the cause of the Palestinians and the PLO? Up to now it's been rather rare that you spoke out with such determination on behalf of a political movement or group. You have done so for the Black Panthers in the US and for the Red Army Faction in the Federal Republic of Germany.

What led me to it has first of all to do with my personal history which I don't want to tell you. That's not interesting. Anyone who wants to know more about that can read my books. That's not important. What I do want to tell you, however, is that my previous books—I stopped writing about thirty years ago—belong to a period of dreaming, of day-dreaming. Once I had passed through this dream, this day-dream, it was time to take action in order to reach something like fulfillment in my life. You mentioned the Black Panthers and the Red Army Faction as well as the Palestinians. To make it short, let me tell you, that I supported those who asked me to get involved. The Black Panthers came to Paris and asked me to come to the United States, which I did immediately. Klaus Croissant came and asked me to help the cause of Baader. Ten years ago it was the Palestinians who said I should come to Jordan. Madame Chahid asked me a year ago to come to Beirut. Of course I was on the side of the people who rebelled. Because of course I myself also questioned all of society.

So we have Genet as a man in revolt, a fighter? After all, it's not that easy a decision to go to Lebanon, as a fighter or as an eye-witness, someone who reports about it, as you did.

In 1967 . . . I don't know who had caused that war . . . was it Nasser, was it Israel . . . I don't want to determine that . . . I was in England. I took a train to France, no special reason. It so happened that there were only Englishmen in my compartment. I asked them where they were going. They said: "To Israel. To help." They all were Jews. I assume you'd find it quite understandable that Englishmen would come to the aid of Israel, because Israel was in danger. Now why do you ask me what reasons I had to help a people in danger? There are connections between the Palestinians, the Panthers, the Red Army Faction and myself. So it's normal that I'd help them. I can't help them much, because a seventy-three-year-old man can't do much for a young people that revolts. But as much as I can help them, I do.

In your book "4 Hours in Chattila" as well as in previous books you talk about the beauty you found there. A beauty, for which there was a place, macabre and tragic, to be sure, even in Lebanon. That is also why I wanted to know what made you go to Lebanon.

I've also been in banks. And I never saw a beautiful bank. I ask myself, if this beauty you're talking about—and it's a problem for me, too, I ask myself this question—if this beauty of which I wrote in my books doesn't come from the fact that the rebels regained a freedom they had lost. Is it difficult

to follow me?

Yes, somewhat. What does this beauty and this freedom consist of?

The beauty of the revolutionaries manifests itself in a kind of matter-of-factness, an insolence even, towards the people who had humiliated them. Don't forget that you're talking to someone who has lived for seventy-three years in France, a country which owned a huge colonial empire. Therefore I myself had been wrecked for reasons I'd rather not explain to you. I was crushed by this notion of France. So it was totally natural for me to be on the side of those rebel people who asked for my support. This beauty I am talking about and which shouldn't be referred to so much—I'm afraid, it might be an illusion—this beauty lies in the fact that former slaves broke free from their enslavement, their submission, their humiliation to achieve freedom from France (in the Algerian War) or, in the case of the blacks, from the United States or, in the case of the Palestinians, from the entire Arabic world.

In our world where two superpowers determine all politics, isn't that a futile hope which has no chance of fulfillment?

You're asking difficult questions; it would take some time to answer them properly, but you don't give me any time to think. I'd need at least four or five days to think about them. Anyway, you talk about superpowers. That is correct. However, these superpowers leave some room for some peoples to free themselves from the respective subordinate powers. Now, when you say all hope is futile, a quick, almost malicious answer comes to my mind: What isn't futile in this world? I am asking you this: What isn't futile in the end? You'll die. I'll die. They'll all die . . . well . . .

When you were in Israel last year, didn't you feel like a spectator sometimes, even though you were traveling on assignment from a Palestinian magazine? I'm asking you this question because, to be totally truthful, it wasn't your own struggle which you observed as an eye-witness. After all, you're not Palestinian.

Yes, exactly. I want to elaborate on that. When the Palestinian representative in Paris invited me to come to Jordan—I'm jumping back now thirteen years—the Palestinian people were somewhat alien to me. I only knew them from French papers and magazines. I asked myself where I was going. I'm going to tell you one experience I had. I was in Deraa. Deraa is a little town on the Syrian-Jordanian border. Every day there were fights there between the Syrian and Palestinian forces. The PLO had rented a little house in Deraa and transformed it into a hospital. They received visitors there, people like myself who came to offer their support to the Palestinians. You're absolutely right to say that in the beginning I was a spectator. I arrived as a spectator. Now, when I came to this house, I was asked after a while

whether I'd like some coffee. So coffee was made. When it was brought to me I noticed two Palestinians in their battle uniforms, with their caps on their heads. They smiled, they laughed, they spoke a guttural Arabic. They were leaning against two crates. They laughed, and I still remember how they tapped the crates with their fingers. Their fingers were sharp and dry and they beat the crates with a kind of certainty. When I left I took another look at the crates: those two who were talking to each other were actually leaning against two coffins. In fact, they were waiting for two dead Palestinians who were brought in eventually in sacks and put into those crates. I'm telling you this because this was my first impression of the Palestinians. Almost immediately I was captivated by the weight, the truth of the gestures of these men.

When I left Paris I still was under the influence of a very literary Middle East. Even the newspapers reported about it in a very literary manner. The only thing missing were quotes from *1001 Nights*. Up to then I only knew the traditional Arab world. Already as an eighteen-year-old I'd been to a bazaar in Damascus. Now, among those Palestinians I saw people whose gestures were filled with heavy, real weight. It was the weight of reality. In Arab countries people give packages of cigarettes as gifts. But not one cigarette was lit and smoked carelessly. A cigarette meant something. A bucket of water, carried by a woman, meant something. You saw the bucket, you saw the water, you saw the woman. In short, what I feel, what I sensed almost from the first day, was that these people were the first in the Arab world who found a way, a modern way, to connect to themselves. And their revolt is modern.

What really amazes me again and again is the unreal aspect we hear in Europe about the fighting in Lebanon, between the Palestinians and the Israelis. We've gotten so used to hearing the number of casualties; only when it's really extreme massacres, as in Sabra and Chattila, do we become conscious again that these are real people dying. What do you think about this sense of it being unreal which we as distant observers have.

Well, as to your sense of it being unreal, it's not the Palestinians who come to my mind, but you yourself. You transform everything into something unreal so it's easier for you to take. It's easier to accept an unreal dead person or an unreal massacre than a woman who carries real letters into real camps. You see, it's primarily you who accepts the massacres and turns them into something unreal. Yesterday, when you saw Madame Chahid's photos of Chattila, it may have been the first time that you saw documents which weren't made in a studio. Because the documents which are being circulated by newspapers and magazines, just like the reports of journalists, are perceived as if they were made in a studio.

There is this notion of Jean Genet, the writer, as the loner. As with the Pan-

thers or the Palestinians, you do, however, seek contact with a collective, with very strong groups. Are you attracted to such groups?

Yes, yes. Now I do want to talk, very briefly, about my personal history. You see, it was in prison that I started to write five books. Five, not six. Writing always means to talk about one's childhood. It's always looking back . . . writing, at any rate, and modernist writing in general. As you know, the first sentence in Proust's work begins: "For a long time I used to go to bed early." And he tells his entire childhood which fills fifteen hundred or two thousand pages. I was thirty when I started to write. I was thirty-four or thirty-five when I stopped writing. It was a dream, a day-dream at least. I wrote in prison. When I came out, I was lost. I really found myself—my way around the real world—only in those two revolutionary movements: the Black Panthers and the Palestinians. That's when I submitted to the real world. That means doing something today which I didn't do yesterday. In short, I acted under the conditions of the real world and not in the world of syntax. At least, in as much as it is possible to juxtapose the real world with a dream world. Dreams are real. But we also know that while we can have an unlimited effect on our dreams we do not have an unlimited effect on the real world. Another discipline is needed which is no longer determined by syntax.

I told you before we started this interview that I read "4 Hours in Chattila" not only as an eyewitness report but also as a novel. What I meant was that this text contains the nucleus of what could well be, say, a contemporary novel about the Near East. You replied immediately: "No, no, that's not a novel. I was really there."

It wasn't a novel because to me that term points immediately to a world of dreams, to the unreal. *Madame Bovary* is a novel. In that sense this text is not a novel. If you use the term "novel" to define a literary genre, this is not a novel.

But this text also contains a very special way of writing. One senses immediately Genet, the story teller, the literary figure.

OK. I only have one more thing to say to that. Degas, the painter, wrote a sonnet. He showed it to Mallarmé and Mallarmé thought it was bad. So Degas said to Mallarmé: "Nonetheless, I've put many thoughts into it." And Mallarmé replied: "A poem isn't made of thoughts but of words." The kind of story I wrote wasn't made of my thoughts. But I did write it in my words. In order to talk about a reality which wasn't my reality.

Still, I ask myself what exactly is the big difference between the literary eyewitness and the reporter. It was you who insisted so adamantly that you stopped writing thirty years ago.

I won't ask you to read my books which I wrote thirty years ago. But if you tried, you'd see that it's not the same way of writing. By the same token, you'll also notice that it's the same person talking.

In your piece about Chattila one gets a sense of the world of the Palestinians. One can almost see each individual person. At the beginning of our talk you said that the beauty which you described lies in this people's feeling of freedom.

Wait . . . that's not all. In the beginning, I think I also emphasized the weight, the strength, the power of the gestures. All that adds up to beauty. Now I will ask you. Wouldn't you say that this kind of beauty is found in the real world? What is it that painters are looking for? Rembrandt or Cézanne? Don't they look precisely for this weight of reality? Isn't that what it's all about? And they did find it, at least those I mentioned. But don't you feel that in the Arab world this weight doesn't generally exist? Those countries rely on military and police regimes. The Palestinians, on the other hand, found exactly that weight—I'm afraid I'm getting very literary now—they have reached the weight of Cézanne's paintings. They're pushing themselves on us. Every Palestinian is real. Like Cézanne's "Montagne Saint-Victoire." She's real. She's right there.

Why did you say you were afraid you were getting too literary?

Because I'm afraid this conversation is pushing me back thirty years.

Madame Chahid, who accompanies you, also asked you this question: Where do you see the difference between your books of thirty years ago and today?

Actually I've said it already. Alright, then, I repeat. In my books and while I was in jail I could do what I wanted in the realm of my imagination. I was master over the things I was working on because all I was dealing with was the world of my dreams. But now I'm no longer above the things which I've seen. I am obligated to say that I've seen people who were tied, chained, a woman whose fingers had been cut off. I have to submit to reality. But I'm doing so in the same words which are my words.

Especially in your plays I get the impression that all people have lost their dignity, also their pride. What's so noticeable in the text about Chattila is undoubtedly the desire for dignity in the people you describe. Isn't that also a crucial difference?

When you mention my plays, can you tell me which ones you're talking about?

The Balcony *for example.*

Yes. In *The Balcony* . . . well, in *The Balcony* we're also dealing with entertainment. Besides, I had to fulfill a contract. You know I was commissioned to write that play. I was paid of lot of money so I had to write it. But, I didn't just sketch a portrait of any old world, it was a portrait of the Western world. Do you remember the themes of *The Balcony*? It's about a bordello and every dignitary, every client of *The Balcony* comes to look for his dignity, a visible dignity.

But the dignity was in the disguise.

Of course.

But isn't the kind of dignity you described and experienced in the Palestinians completely different?

Completely different. I would never think of writing about Yassir Arafat's bandanna. I noticed a few things about his bandanna. You know that Arafat has no hair. But his bandanna has a fringe of hanging threads. I remember how he constantly played with that fringe of his bandanna. Bishops, or our present pope, are completely contained in their costume. But Arafat isn't stuck in his bandanna. He's still in other places too. But just imagine the pope dressed like you or I!

One could assume Genet reveals himself as moralist.

What you're saying about me doesn't bother me at all. Just don't confuse a moralist with someone who is moralizing.

Do you feel that your literary work is a past that burdens you when you work, travel or write today?

Are you asking me whether today I reject any work of art or writing? Of course not. I could only write the books I wrote thirty years ago because of inclinations which I developed, towards which life had led me. If I hadn't done all that work myself . . . that's what you thought, and you're probably right . . . I'd probably have started as an observer. You asked me whether that's not what I am: an observer. When I was still very young I understood quickly that everything in life was closed to me. I went to public school up to the age of thirteen. At best I could've become an accountant or a small clerk. Therefore, I didn't prepare myself to become an accountant, or a writer, for that matter—I didn't know that then—rather, I prepared myself to observe the world. Because I was useless to the world and also because I couldn't change the world, I observed the world. Already at the age of twelve or fifteen I created the observer in me, the person I needed to be and, consequently, the writer I was to become. That work on myself which I did then continues to exist.

*I've asked you whether a revolution, even a revolt, makes sense in a divided world. I want to expand that question. Is this revolt which is so important to you related to the "*acte gratuit,*" the existential revolt? I'm thinking more of Camus, rather than Sartre.*

I don't know Camus well, because that man annoys me. I've met him—a man who moralizes a lot. No, I think, even in a world that is divided between two superpowers—you were alluding to the United States and the Soviet Union—even there the revolt of every individual remains necessary. What did you do yourself? Madame Chahid ordered coffee; you turned off the tape recorder when the waiter came. That is how you performed a small act of revolt. And I moved an object away. Every day we perform small revolts. As soon as one creates a small disorder, which is to say, as soon as one creates one's own, individual order, one performs a revolt.

The revolts you are talking about are highly individual gestures. However, revolutionary groups like the Panthers or the Palestinians demand the submission of the individual to a strict order. The order of a revolution also demands obedience. Doesn't this apparently necessary gesture of submission bother you?

Leila Chahid had asked me to write for the *Revue d'Etudes Palestiniennes* and first I said no. I said no because everything I knew about the Palestinians dated back thirteen, at least twelve years, and was transmitted to me via *Le Monde*—a racist newspaper, which is hard to believe, it's masking itself—or via other newspapers and TV. In short, I knew nothing about the reality of the Palestinians. When Leila insisted and I began to make myself available—a little bit at least, but not too much—to the Palestinian cause, I said, the simplest thing for me to do would be to go to Beirut. So I went to Beirut with Leila. That is, I put myself at her disposal. When Leila asked me to come to Vienna, to talk to you among other things, well, I came. Really, it doesn't bother me. On the contrary, I'd say that I feel a kind of larger freedom. Because in the meantime I've learned that to a certain extent—not too much, because I am very old—that I can help a movement like the Palestinians, I feel all the freer.

The revolt of European intellectuals in this century was mostly a revolt of individuals. That is why they were so frequently criticized by organized revolutionary movements. I am thinking of the feuds between surrealists and communists, the conflicts among French intellectuals around 1968. A whole history, a tradition grew out of this.

Now listen. The day the Palestinians establish themselves, I'll no longer be at their side. The day the Palestinians become a nation like any other nation, I'll no longer be part of it.

The intellectual as guerrilla?

Exactly.

And your Palestinian friends know that and accept that?

I think that'll be the moment when I am going to betray them. They don't know it.

In another interview you said at the end of the conversation that you always lie a bit the moment you start talking. I don't know if that wasn't just an ironic gesture.

It was a little bit of a joke, too, but deep down it is what I feel. I am honest only with myself. As soon as I start talking I am already betrayed by the situation. I am betrayed by the person who listens to me. Simply on account of the information, the communication. My choice of words betrays me. When I talk to myself, alone, I don't lie. I don't have the time for it. I don't need to kid myself. I'm too old to lie to myself. I commit myself to the Palestinians when I am alone, not when I say yes to Leila, yes, I'll come with you. It happens . . . when I am alone, when I make my decision in solitude.

Interview with Jean Genet by Ruediger Wischenbart from Die Zeit, *March 30, 1984. Translated by Gitta Honegger.*

The Academy of Fashion

Beach Hits the Wave at BAM

Gerald Rabkin

The 1984 Next Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music—the fourth of that designation but the second as a full-fledged fall festival—was dominated more than any of its predecessors by a single offering: the revival of the landmark 1976 collaboration between Robert Wilson and Philip Glass, *Einstein on the Beach*. That a revival should so overwhelm the immediately contemporary, that the most powerful wave to hit the beach should be eight years old, is a paradox that speaks both to the institutionalizing of the avant-garde that the Next Wave Festival represents, and to the growing inability and/or unwillingness of the contemporary experimental arts to challenge and disturb. The more the festival succeeds in increasing its attendance and box-office gross (and last year's festival compared to 1983 increased its percentage of capacity from 76 to 84% and its gross from $528,000 to $1,030,000, the latter largely due to *Einstein*'s Broadway prices), the more it inevitably surrenders the historic role of the avant-garde to *resist* contemporary taste. If, as a recent article in the Sunday New York *Times* asserts, "The Avant-Garde is Big Box-Office," have we indeed reached a point where the very notions "avant-garde" and "Next Wave" are obsolete, appropriated by a new academy of fashion?

I raise this fundamental paradox not to denigrate the very real achievements of the Next Wave Festival but to note that its title really misnames those achievements. The Next Wave has never primarily sought out the unsettling and the provocative. It has always affirmed not disruption but the continuity and interdependence of the disparate experimental arts; it has

worked to forge a contemporary experimental tradition that can stand beside those in the conventional arts. In its presentations over the past four festivals, even in earlier BAM offerings, the same names appear with regularity: Trisha Brown, Lucinda Childs, Philip Glass, Steve Reich, and—often proposed, often cancelled—Robert Wilson, names usually hyphenated as the artists combine across the arts. Indeed, BAM has been the American flagship of a particular form of inter-arts collaboration whose scale demands financial support almost impossible outside of an institutionalized framework. In commissioning and producing large-scale experimental collaborations, the Next Wave has tried to fill the cultural void that has sent so many of our advanced artists to Europe. This is clearly a worthy and substantial acheivement if we do not insist upon the cutting edge of an art of disturbance.

The revival of *Einstein* makes particular sense in this context, for more than any other work of the past decade, the Wilson/Glass opera has defined the model of large-scale interdisciplinary collaboration that the Next Wave has consistently championed: *not* a *gesamtkunstwerk* in which all is subordinated to a singular artistic vision, but a Brechtian coexistence of dialectical elements, each with a degree of aesthetic autonomy. Whether such coexistence is fully achievable is debatable, but the fact remains that such collaboration consciously rejects traditional aesthetic hierarchies. It is not a form our compartmentalized critical establishment understands nor appreciates, for it challenges the stability of the individual critical turf. Whose *Einstein* is this anyway? In 1976, despite its performance at the Metropolitan Opera, it was viewed as Wilson's, with Glass's music and DeGroat's dances clearly backup. This time around—though Wilson was given his due by some—the critical focus has shifted to Glass whose reputation has grown steadily during the past decade while Wilson's major work was being produced abroad. The judgment that *Einstein*'s designation as opera was to be taken literally was reinforced by the almost concurrent production by the City Opera of Glass's *Akhnaten*, the third in his sequence of music theatre pieces on mythic historic figures that began with *Einstein*. Despite Mel Gussow's belated salute to Wilson the final Sunday of the BAM run, the *Times* canonized the revisionary move to Glass by having music critic John Rockwell write the primary review of the piece—a full week after it opened ("Music: 'Einstein' Returns Briefly"). Significantly, both Frank Rich and Anna Kisselgoff (despite new choreography by Lucinda Childs) remained silent.

And yet, without denying the deserved reputation of Glass's hypnotic score, the element that made this *Einstein* an important event was the return of Robert Wilson, the Wagner of the avant-garde, the prophet without honor in his own country. Wilson is one of the few contemporary experimentalists who remains provocative, not so much by the quality of his work, which, despite length and repetitiveness, is essentially meditative, dreamlike, and reposeful, but because of the Faustian scale of his ambitions. In the 1970s

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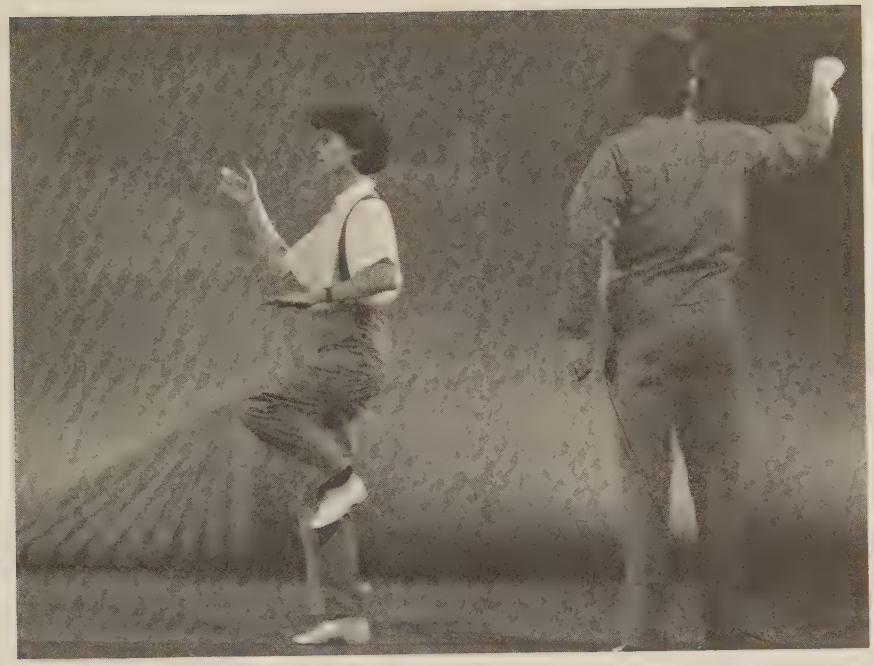


EINSTEIN ON THE BEACH

Wilson rejected his designated place below 14th Street to storm the citadels of the theatrical and musical establishment with his iconoclastic productions (a style defined by Bonnie Marranca as "The Theatre of Images" in her seminal 1977 book on Wilson, Richard Foreman, and Lee Breuer, published under the title *The Theatre of Images,* a fact nowhere credited in the book called *Robert Wilson: Theatre of Images* on sale in the BAM lobby during the current revival). Wilson's audacious incursions onto Broadway with *A Letter for Queen Victoria* and the Met with *Einstein* revived the lost avant-garde comedy of the richly dressed bourgeoisie storming out of bewildering and interminable events muttering fierce imprecations. This time around the social comedy was less evident, since Brooklyn is far from Broadway and Lincoln Center. In fact, the reverse phenomenon occurred: the defections were few, and the work was received, for the most part, with the respect and reverence due a classic. But even without the *frisson* of provocation the energy of Wilson's return was palpable: we had forgotten how precise and indelible a visual imagination he possessed, having been denied on our shores *Death, Destruction, and Detroit* and his still to be ingathered *the CIVIL warS*, the projected twelve-hour epic that failed to be presented at the Olympic Arts Festival in Los Angeles last summer (the two and a half hour Cologne section did, however, reach the ART in Cambridge, Mass. late last winter). That Philip Glass was not the least of the victims of Wilson's expatriation was demonstrated by the fiasco of the banal staging of *Akhnaten.* What might Wilson have done with such rich mythic material?

The return of *Einstein*, then, was welcome and productive: it recreated for contemporary audiences a short-lived (only two Met performances in 1976) but historic event; it repatriated the artistically-exiled Wilson who did not disappoint in a production even more precise, evocative, and properly scaled than its predecessor; it validated the aesthetic of major inter-arts collaboration by setting a standard of the highest acheivement; and it affirmed that there is indeed an experimental tradition worth following. But it also showed that there are few around right now with Wilson's heroic amplitude of vision. Before *Einstein*'s triumphant final surge, I fear, the Next Wave offerings were gentle ripples.

It did not initially seem that it would be so. For in opening the festival with Meredith Monk and Ping Chong's *The Games* an initial event was promised comparable in scale and collaborative energy to its last. Meredith Monk has been working experimentally even longer than Wilson, for two decades creating pieces large and small in spaces ranging from the Guggenheim to a Connecticut arboretum to St. John the Divine to La Mama. Of all contemporary experimentalists she has most consistently blurred the boundaries that demarcate the various arts. With initial roots in dance, with recent roots most deeply in music, Monk at her best has created a shifting, mythic theatrical universe in which time, space, sound, movement mysteriously transform one into the other. Like Monk, Ping Chong, who has moved from performer in such of her works as *Quarry* and *Vessel* to full-scale collaborator, has created over the past decade an impressive body of experimental work which also boldly transgresses formal boundaries. But

THE GAMES

Tom Caravaglia

Tom Caravaglia

where Monk's cross-generic sallies elide aesthetic forms in the impulse toward the mythic and trans-historic, in Chong's work each medium is discrete as he contemplates different levels of aesthetic discourse and sets up a distanced, quasi-scientific dialectic among the elements of his creation.

The Games, then, represents not a collaboration between artists from different traditions coexisting according to a Cunningham-Cage model of independence, but the shared creation of two fiercely individual cross-generic artists who share aesthetic strategies. Yet their individuality shapes their collaboration, with Monk's holistic vision submitted to Chong's analytic scrutiny. It would be unprofitable to pursue each's contributions, but Monk/Chong watchers will note formal and thematic preoccupations of each. The basic structures of *The Games*, for example, bears unmistakable affinities with Chong's recent work *A Race* (1984), a disturbing futuristic vision in which a platitudinous headmaster submits a graduating class (of humans? animals masquerading as humans?) to programmed rituals of indoctrination and depersonalization. *The Games* recapitulates the structure of *A Race* without much of the latter's tantalizing ambiguity. We are clearly in some apocalyptic, post-Holocaust future in which the survivors, led by a Big Brother gamesmaster, engage in a series of children's games, guessing games, more complex games that merge into

ritual, in order to rediscover through physical memory their past culture that has been repressed by catastrophic discontinuity. The games are not pastimes but moral necessities if life is to renew and some shards of history are to be salvaged. It is a cautionary parable with the same important theme as the work of Milan Kundera: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." But it is not one, in my view, best expressed either by Monk's distinctively simultaneous vision, which collapses the thematic into shifting aesthetic forms, or Chong's distanced, anthropological scrutiny, which distrusts the overtly thematic because it demands a univalent discourse. I would be the last to deny the validity of cautionary post-nuclear parables, but neither Monk nor Chong's sensibility can evoke the visceral performance level imperative to their theme. Performance in both Monk and Chong's work—unless, for the former, expressed through the personal vocabulary of her own dancing—has always been subordinate to aesthetic patterning. Here, the absence of performance vitality fails to summon forth the horror of post-Holocaust apocalypse. Robert Wilson's subordination of performance works because his vision is ultimately meditative and transcendent; in *The Games* the opposite emotions need to be evoked but are defeated by harmonic meticulousness.

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of the other presentations in the festival. Viewed as a series of individual performances, there were "successes" but few surprises. Of the predominantly dance events the greatest impact was made by Mark Morris's work as soloist and choreographer and Arnie Zane and Bill T. Jones's *Secret Pastures.* Morris's setting of Vivaldi's *Gloria in D*—with its vigorous intersections and juxtapositions of rising and falling dancers—projected a distinctive visceral energy. *Secret Pastures* wittily represented that aspect of contemporary dance with an unrepentant eye on popular art and the street. The quintessence of what the *Voice* has termed "Avant Pop," the work—an ironic send-up of the Frankenstein theme with a mad "Professor" (Zane) creating and civilizing a "fabricated man" (Jones)—contained punk "head designs" and trendy costumes, graffitized sets by Keith Haring and, most impressively, an imaginative score by art-rock composer Peter Gordon. Other dance evenings presented small pleasures: Remy Charlip's unabashed celebration of a child-like joy of expressiveness, Elissa Monte's nuanced and sensual distillation of Martha Graham and Pilobolus. Of the concert offerings, Steve Reich's *Desert Music* was the major event. An ambitious piece for large orchestra and amplified chorus of 27, *The Desert Music*, despite its scale, hewed to minimalist aesthetics, affirming this articulated line from William Carlos Williams's poetry (its point of derivation): "It is a premise of music to repeat the theme." For this listener, the repetition led as much to enervation as submission, a conflict of reaction similarly produced by Richard Landry's concert with its long saxophone solo with quadrophonic tape delay.

The lesson from all this is that despite its proclaimed collaborative model

Barry Alterman

MARK MORRIS DANCE GROUP

the Next Wave has moved toward performances that are not really cross-generic at all, but which are in the mainstream of the contemporary arts. For in dance and music, unlike theatre, the modern and the postmodern have indeed now become part of the mainstream. New dance and music have always resided at the heart of the Next Wave—Glass, Reich, Branca beside Brown, Dean, Childs—but in this festival a narrowing of focus has become more insistent. The cross-over to performance art and theatre realized most impressively in the past by Laurie Anderson's *United States* and Breuer/Telson's *Gospel at Colonus* is represented here at best with Monk/Chong's tepid *Games* and at worst by Tim Miller's overload of predictable imagery in *Democracy in America*. The return of *Einstein on the Beach* revealed that a decade ago there was indeed an experimental energy that broke new ground. Does the cozy familiarity of the rest of these Next Wave offerings suggest that the present avant-garde is a sleeping beauty waiting for a new prince's kiss of arousal?

L'Illusion
Pierre Corneille
Directed by Giorgio Strehler
Teatro Lirico (Milan)

Temporale
August Strindberg
Directed by Giorgio Strehler
Piccolo Teatro di Milano (Paris)

Rosette Lamont

As the lights dim, before the curtain rises, two gentlemen in period costumes, members of the solid French seventeenth-century bourgeoisie, slowly make their way towards the stage through the center aisle. They are Pridamant, father of the long-missing young Clindor, who ran away from home to make his own way in the world, and a devoted family friend, Dorante. The latter, gropingly, leads the way. He is taking the disconsolate father to the cavern of Alcandre, a famous "magician," who might not "move rocks, bring down the clouds, / and light two suns in the night," but who "can read men's secret thoughts, / predict the future and reveal the past." This local soothsayer (his grotto is located "somewhere in Touraine") will, if he so desires, "show" Pridamant his son's reflected form, and the young man's past and present life.

A few steps from the proscenium a velvet-upholstered bench has been set up. Here, Pridamant will watch the proceedings together with the audience in the theatre, and, in turn, the audience will view the play-within-the-play which is about to begin.

The curtain rises, revealing a deep grotto in the bowels of the earth. A

luminous round hole at the back of the stage suggests that the cavern's mouth opens upon a radiant day outside. This is the archetypal cave par excellence, the one described by Plato in Book VII of *The Republic*. It takes a while for the members of the audience to adjust their sight. Like Plato's cave dwellers we "blink through the gloom . . . as our eyes experience the shift from light to darkness and darkness to light." We will be shown phantom people, shadows and shadows of shadows. As they move through the camera obscura of Ezio Frigerio's mesmerizing set, they are also reflected in the black marble tiles of the floor and, when the cave walls dissolve, upon the shining surface of the backdrop. Strehler and Frigerio have crystallized upon the stage Corneille's concept of the "illusion" of life expressed by the magician Alcandre.

L'Illusion is a metaplay, a *féérie* (Corneille calls it "*une galanterie extravagante*") on the subject of the art of theatre. It contains in its closing scene one of the most eloquent eulogies of dramatic art ever written. Corneille's *apologia* reflects the seventeenth-century controversy between the ecclesiastical and the secular points of view. In his last comedy, the young dramatist pleads in favor of an art form loved by "all fine spirits." As Robert Nelson points out in his *Play Within a Play*, the playwright who was about to become the creator in France of neo-classical tragedy (*L'Illusion* is contemporary with *Le Cid*) wished to "dramatize his dramaturgy."

Strehler chose Corneille's much neglected comedy to mark his assumption of the directorship of the Théâtre de l'Europe (in Paris at the Odeon Théâtre and in Milan at the Teatro Lirico), and to celebrate the tricentenary of Corneille's death. As he stated in conversation with me: "This is a play about magic, and magicians, but, above all, it is a play about the magic of theatre. Alcandre is another Prospero. *L'Illusion* is a meditation upon the art of the stage."

Unlike Jouvet, whom Strehler acknowledges as one of his masters and who revived *L'Illusion Comique* in 1937, the Italian director did not choose to present the "play scene" of the final act as an obvious play-within-the-play acted with broad exaggeration upon an inner stage, erected within the box of the larger stage. Pridamant must at all times believe that he is being shown a faithful image of reality, and the audience is to share his "illusion."

In his "Examen" of the play, written thirty years after *L'Illusion*'s first performance, the dramatist says that he established echoes between the early scenes depicting Clindor's supposedly "real" life (his courtship of Isabelle and hot erotic pursuit of the lovely but impoverished Lyse, a possible mistress but not a proper wife) and Clindor/Théagène's adulterous designs upon the wife of his princely benefactor, so that an ambiguity would be created. Indeed, as the play progresses, it becomes increasingly difficult to tell reality and illusion apart. Together with Pridamant, the audience

Luigi Ciminaghi

L'ILLUSION

realizes only much later that the tragic happenings of Act V, Scene 2 were merely an enactment. The artistocratic costumes worn by Clindor, Isabelle and Lyse, the very same which were shown the hapless father by Alcandre at the start of the play, were, as it soon becomes obvious, stage vestments. Like the noble names of the characters in the final act, they superimpose upon their identity the assumed persona of the role they have to play. Thus, Clindor's death by the avenging rapier of Florilame's courtier, Eraste, is only make-believe. Pridamant will watch with delight the sudden resurrection of the son he believed dead. Now, dressed in casual garb, Clindor is busy counting the money earned by his troupe for this performance. The clicking coins dispel the illusion and elicit the audience's laughter. Meanwhile, Pridamant undergoes a healing conversion to his son's secular ritual; he proclaims that Clindor's vocation is a noble activity, superior in every way to his own business pursuits.

Another important feature of Corneille's *L'Illusion Comique* is the creation of a ridiculous hero, Matamore (the name in Spanish signifies "killer of the Moors"). Written for the actor Bellmore, a member of Montdory's Théâtre du Marais, this role has been described as an anticipated anti-Cid. Whereas Rodrigue is the dramatic incarnation of the heroic spirit, Matamore appears as the grotesque caricature of the dream of glory.

In Strehler's production, this inveterate braggart, a poltroon inadequately disguised by self-dramatization, looks like a *commedia dell'arte* Cyrano de Bergerac: an impertinently long nose—almost a beak—a plumed hat wav-

ing like a barnyard rooster's comb, an oversize sword in a constant state of erection. As he struts upon the stage, cock-a-doodling, twirling his flowing cape like a frenzied matador and drawing actual sparks—an amusing stage device—from the épée he pretends to unsheath at every mention of possible enemies or rivals in love, he elicits laughter tinged with a kind of amazement. Charles Baudelaire would doubtlessly classify him among those metaphysical clowns capable of what the poet calls "le grotesque comique absolu" (*De l'essence du rire*). There is something vertiginous about Matamore's imaginings, as though he believed in man's superiority over nature. Indeed, his fantastic tales of military and erotic prowess reach cosmic proportions as when he claims that a while ago the goddess Dawn deserted her post as a guide of the sun's chariot to linger in his bedchamber, begging him for love.

Strehler's stroke of genius in his re-reading of *L'Illusion* is to have required of the fine actor, Gerard Desarthe, to interpret both the role of Alcandre and that of Matamore. What this suggests is that the magician and the braggart represent two aspects of the triumph of art and imagination over paltry reality. Whereas Alcandre might be Corneille himself—the artist who lends reality to stage illusionism—Matamore personifies literary creation. He is a caricature composed of nothing if not poetic discourse. Some of Corneille's most magnificent lines of poetry are those spoken by this clown.

As to Clindor, who embarks upon his career as the companion and ironic double of this mad dreamer, it is his duty as a kind of Christian to this other Cyrano to woo the lovely Isabelle in his master's name. This he does by laughingly embroidering upon the canvas of Matamore's imaginings. Predictably, he wins the lady for himself. His fine looks are only partly responsible for his good fortune; the rest must be imputed to the liberating power of the poetic imagination which, even when caricatured by means of a set of grimacing reflections, still transcends the ennui of the quotidian. Though comic in *L'Illusion*, Matamore's pose opens the emergence of Le Cid. By reviewing Corneille's first tragedy in light of his penultimate comedy, we may conclude that the young dramatist was possessed with the wisdom of mature men; he knew that all is illusion.

"Illusion" for Corneille—the play's initial title was "L'Illusion Comique"—is the essence of dramatic art. Strehler's interpretation is beautifully, subtly faithful to this idea. The spectral images he creates upon the stage (like another Alcandre) may be in the spirit of the moving, dazzling, ever-shifting aesthetic of the Baroque era, but this ambiguous world of make-believe could also be a mirror of our own age. Thus by resurrecting Corneille's *L'Illusion* Strehler has not written a stage testament to a glorious past, but, as always, taken the pulse of the present.

As the audience files into the theatre it finds itself facing a set which constitutes in itself a dramaturgic statement. The curtain is already open. On a smoky-grey, semi-circular reflective wall the facing tiers of the boxes and balconies shine with a muted glow. What is celebrated is the theatre space, but its glorification is elegantly dignified, almost austere. It suggests that a ritual is about to begin, that the public will be held for a while within the subtle circle of a phantasmagoric illusion.

The play opens with a characterstic Strehler storm, gentler than the thunder clap which ushered in *The Tempest*; it is closer perhaps to the dream vision of Lessing's *Minna.* Strindberg's "storm" is a brief, intense summer flare-up, like the short-lived passions unleashed by the characters upon the stage.

In the dark theatre, flashes of lightning reveal that the semi-circular partition, a two-way mirror, has grown transparent, exposing the lives within the house. To our right, on the ground floor, the black and white marble tiles echo the surface of the chess table which occupies a place of honor in the Gentleman's living room. Indeed we will witness a tightly played game. The upper storey windows are veiled by crimson curtains—one of the few notes of color in the play—which suggest the lurid happenings within. To our left, out in the street, a freshly painted white bench faces the house.

The action of the play pits white players against the black, life-size pieces on the chessboard. Those clothed in black are the two evil doers: Gerda, the Gentleman's former wife, a ripe, tormented woman whose strident voice, expressionistic gestures and pathetic pose testify to her new career as *cafe chantant* accompanist and possible whore-mistress, and her new husband, the shady gambler Fischer. The couple runs a gaming club and bordello in their upstairs apartment. It is suggested that Fischer is preparing the Gentleman's daughter for the most ancient of professions.

The rest of the *dramatis personae* wear elegant turn-of-the-century white linen suits and dresses. Louise, the Gentleman's "relative," who runs his household, slides silently by, carrying snow-white bed linen and freshly laundered tablecloths. She is an allegorical figure of peace, purity, dignity. The Pastry Cook, Starck, whose hellishly hot kitchen is located in the basement, emerges from its depths wearing a white, flour-sprinkled apron. White clouds of steam rise from his establishment. Indeed, the entire house seems girded by a circle of heat.

Ezio Frigerio's splendid set is a crystallization of Strehler's intention to take this late Strindberg play (1907), his first chamber theatre piece, in the direction of symbolic action. Thus, the rooms of the ground-floor apartment, which would normally be hidden behind the opaqueness of the stone facade, have been externalized, brought downstage. As in Corneille's *l'Illusion*, the characters are doubled by their dim reflection in the semi-circular

enclosing wall which is behind them when they appear at the front of the stage. Nor do they speak directly to one another. Often they seem to be engaged in dialogue with ghosts, apparitions, or their other selves. Strehler's emphasis on stylized speech and movement lends a hieratic slowness and deliberation to the proceedings. We are reminded that *Storm* is contemporary with *Ghost Sonata.*

Luigi Ciminaghi

TEMPORALE

The story is deceptively simple. Having married late in life and sired a daughter, the Gentleman enters into an agreement with his wife: he will leave her free to pursue her own life, vanishing from it the moment he feels that he is getting too old for her. The protagonist—he is identified only as the Gentleman, a retired civil servant—lives alone, surrounded by the objects which constituted the decor of his former married life. He lavishes special care on his wife's plants, and has erected a kind of shrine to the past by preserving the photographs of the woman and their child.

Unbeknownst to him, Gerda and her husband have moved into the vacant upstairs apartment. The Gentleman is only aware that noisy, orgiastic parties are going on overhead. His brother, the Consul, who joins him for a daily evening stroll, or a game of chess, meets with Gerda—perhaps his former lover—and urgers the unhappy woman to reveal her presence to her former husband.

The climax of this short, intense play takes place in the course of a violent confrontation in the downstairs apartment. The Gentleman, when he becomes aware of Gerda's intrusion, is profoundly stirred by her piteous, sensual presence. However, he wishes to keep the past as something embalmed, a memory in a jar. The stormy clash between the spouses evokes Pirandello's *Six Characters.* At one point, the Gentleman, losing all self-control leaps upon the chess table as though to strangle the woman on the other side. This is Italian Strindberg at its best.

Has the "storm" been averted? Perhaps no one has been struck by lightning, but, left alone, the Gentleman lights one match, then another. As he recalls in a brief soliloquy how everyone attempted to impose their will upon him, he mimics the firing of a powder keg. Suddenly, this peaceful middle-class man becomes a Dionysian force. As he holds his burning match closer and closer to the audience, it becomes clear that Strehler is showing us Strindberg, the firebrand, the revolutionary thinker and writer. This scene is a key to the entire play.

Temporale, however, does not end with this hint of terrorism. Peace has returned to the house with the departure of Fischer and of the Gentleman's wife and daughter who have gone to live with Gerda's mother. Twilight falls like a benediction. The street lights go on, glowing reassuringly in the dark. The white nights of a northern summer are over. The Gentleman states: "Let the light of reason guide us, so we won't lose our way." Perhaps this is also Giorgio Strehler's message.

La Danse De Mort
August Strindberg
Directed by Claude Chabrol
Théâtre de l'Atelier (Paris)

Arthur Holmberg

Claude Chabrol directing *The Dance of Death*? Why not? The wizard of *film noir*, whose elegant visual style and sensitivity to the psychological ramifications of violence transcend the meretricious genre he has devoted his life to, would seem to command all the requisite talents needed to breathe new life into Strindberg's old masterpiece. All the talents, that is, except one. Chabrol understands nothing about theatre. The catastrophe currently on view at Charles Dullin's Theatre de l'Atelier proves again that film and drama are false cognates and that whereas it's relatively easy for actors and directors to migrate from stage to studio, the reverse seldom, if ever, succeeds.

Chabrol didn't deviate from a four-square, realistic mode. The play opened in total darkness with the sound of waves pounding the shore. The set, a grey stone, subterranean dungeon, failed completely to create the claustrophobic atmosphere Strindberg's regressive dyad moves in as their element. The actors took an elegant, comedy of manners approach. When Alice, who looked like a denizen of Toulouse-Lautrec's demi-monde—alerted Kurt to the fact that she needed to slip into something more comfortable, she languidly unbuttoned her bodice. When he kissed her open bosom, she squealed like a sow, then burst into giggles. Only Michel Bouqet as Edgar was not deceived by the realistic surfaces of the play. Only he caught the restless spiritual fever that drives Strindberg's lost souls. And the violence. His "Entry of the Boyars" was one of the few scenes that caught fire theatrically. Storming back and forth in a frenzy of impotent rage, one actually expected him to lop off Kurt's head with his saber and then go to work on the audience.

"We live, we die, we become fertilizer . . ." By shrugging his shoulders and waving his hand as if to shoo away a nagging fly, Bouqet also pierced beyond the bravado to Edgar's despair. A master actor in a master role, but acting in a vacuum.

No production of a great play is ever completely a waste. Chabrol did catch some of the light-hearted good humor of the play—a quality sadly lacking in Anglo-Saxon productions that tackle Strindberg as boxer versus slugger. But high spirits are as much a part of *Dance of Death* as anger and agression, and in the anniversary scene—with only a candelabra flickering across the stage—one sensed some of the excitement expected from Chabrol all along.

"Literature," Strindberg complained "makes me sick. It's a disgusting occupation, stripping yourself and your acquaintances naked." Unfortunately, Chabrol didn't strip Strindberg far enough.

Fertility Dance
Kaibola Village
Trobriand Island (Papua New Guinea)

Bettina L. Knapp

On the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea dances are often associated with yam cults. Perhaps because yams are the staple food in the Trobriands, they have taken on a kind of sacredness. Great care is therefore taken in preparing them. After they have been uprooted from the

garden grounds, cleaned and dried, they are exhibited and contemplated with veneration. Then they are carried into the village with the same respect and awe accorded saints' effigies and religious relics in the West. The yams, their number depending upon the tribe's wealth, are neatly stacked in specially built open yam houses located in the center or inner ring of the village, where they are protected by a circle of people's houses. Around the thatched-roof habitations, which are elevated from the ground, is a ring of trees and vegetation which further guarantees the safety of the community's sacred food.

Performed at Kaibola village, the fertility dance is an important ritual in Trobriand culture, a ritual celebration of the earth's yam yield, and of the procreative powers of women. Trobriand women are granted great sexual license: from the time they reach puberty to the day they marry, unmarried girls are not only allowed, but encouraged to have as many relationships as possible. Once married, however, they are expected to remain faithful to their husbands—for ten months of the year. Only during the yam festival period, in July and August, does society again sanction sexual freedom for them.

The fertility dance, with its explicit gestures and tug-of-war, is performed exclusively by women, usually during the annual feast period, known as the *milamela,* when yams are plentiful. The *milamela,* which Bronislaw Malinowski called a "social and magico-religious phenomenon," ushers in a period of dancing that may last from one moon to the next, the dancing accompanied by increased sexual activity.

Bare-breasted young girls and married women alike wear grass skirts, some decorated with leaves, herbs, and cowrie shells. On their faces and bodies various intriguing designs are painted, most frequently circular motifs symbolizing cycles of nature. Like the Trobriand men, women have their secret societies which a man may not enter. If he tries to, the women have the right to beat and vilify him, and even threaten him with death. Trobriand women take the role they place in their society very seriously and should a man consider them lightly, painful consequences may be in the offing.

The dance of the women, which revolves around the sanctity of life and the mystery of childbearing, is meant to celebrate universal fertility. As such, the performance takes on greater than ordinary dimension, since reproduction is no longer viewed as an individual act, nor even a collective one, but becomes, instead, a cosmic happening. That men are jealous of the powers of women (represented by their menstruation and their ability to create life) is clear from the way they look at the dancers. Women, too, are envious of the men's secret rituals (of their hunting and fishing, their feats of magic, but, most particularly, their ability to communicate with the *baloma,* dead spirits of men).

TUG OF WAR DANCE

As the women moved in a circle around the dance space, the drums sounded measured beats. At first they moved to and fro, covering only a small area, but then they enlarged the circle through sequences of short, tight, abrupt steps that kept time with the simple, varied rhythms of kundu drums. Abandoning the circle, they began to strut about, their hands wandering provocatively over their bodies, after which they gently but firmly slapped themselves on their buttocks, twisting and turning their swaying hips, aimed at enticing the male to come their way.

For the tug-of-war dance that followed, a rope was laid in the center of the dance space. The group of women broke up into two separate teams, with about twelve women on each side. One woman, representing the spiritual ancestor of the group, started singing, or really cackling, in a high-pitched, brittle voice, as if she were questioning the others. The others answered her in unison, then joined her in her song, thereby indicating that they had entered into communication with that unseen magical world—the sphere of ghosts. In this case, screeching sounds, laughter and giggling accompanied the performers' gestures, but fear as well as a festive mood may be expressed in the dance.

These women, all of whom had participated in the gathering of yams, were expressing their joyful gratitude for the earth's fruitful harvest as well as their pleasure at the thought of past and future yields, and of the sexual freedom granted them by their society. But, of course, life is not always that simple. Nature may not allow a woman to become pregnant or to give birth safely. This is what underlies the tug-of-war that followed: it symbolizes the women's struggle with forces that could overwhelm them. And mightily did they pull, to demonstrate their ability to overcome the odds they constantly face: death, disease, floods, accidents, and other natural disasters.

Although these fertility dances may appear simple to the onlooker, they require a good deal of training and skill. Both the men and the women performers practice their steps nearly every afternoon for weeks on end prior to the performance, in the effort to improve their body and leg movements, and to create new motifs, and simply for the love of dancing. The drummers and singers rehearse, too, as participants in the dance proper, standing to the side of the dancers to reinforce, with their drums or song, the mood of the moment.

Dances in the Trobriand islands also have an educational function, since they transmit the myths and legends of a people via an entire figurative language consisting of gestures, footwork, movement, music, decoration, color, design, and costume. Conveying humankind's relationship to Nature, the dances run the gamut of all the emotions—from deep joy to terror—and in doing so, turning a collective event into a personal living experience.

Bérénice
Jean Racine
Directed by Klaus Michael Grüber
The Comedie Francaise (Paris)

Rosette Lamont

The greatest *succes d'estime* of the 1984-85 season was a *Berenice* directed in the purest classical tradition by a German guest director, Klaus Michael Grüber. He is accused by the dissenters of being *plus royaliste que le roi* in his recreation of the seventeenth century manner of recitation.

Bare, austere, denuded of any kind of gesturing, of impassioned discourse, Gruber's *Bérénice* is centered not on *acting* the text but on forcing the listener's attention. In this era of speed reading, it is cleansing to be reminded that a magnificent literary work requires a special kind of concentration stemming from the focus of the listener's imaginative faculties and a nourishing kind of respect.

Language, Jean-Pierre Vincent, the new director of the Comédie Francaise states, is the commonplace, not in the demeaned sense of "trite," but in its aspect as the *locus* where things and words are possessed in common, shared; where things and events are held and held up to attention by words. Should this be regarded as regression? Grüber and Vincent seem to feel that much has been lost by the contemporary "transgressions" of the text, the inventive re-readings and re-interpretations which at times are acts of betrayal. But perhaps the most serious mistake is the opposition created

Daniel Cande

BERENICE

between classicism and the avant-garde. Gruber's *Bérénice* requires of the audience the same kind of attention it is willing to pay to some of the more subtle and complex works of Beckett, *Footfalls, That Time, Rockaby, Not I.*

In this production the lines are spoken with quiet deliberation. Racine's poetry fills the space of the stage left bare. Not everyone of the actors is able to fulfill this noble exigency. Ludmila Mikael (Bérénice), Catherine Samie (Phenice), Marcel Bozonnet (Antiochus), Roland Bertin (Arsace) are splendid. Richard Fontana's Titus, however, lacks the required moral and political stature. Despite the imbalance, this is a very interesting effort, a relief from the badly modernized versions presented for so many years at the "home of Moliere."

Luces de Bohemia
Ramón del Valle-Inclán
Directed by Lluis Pascual
Teatro María Guerrero (Madrid)

Diálogo secreto
Antonio Buero-Vallejo
Directed by Gustavo Pérez Puig
Teatro Infanta Isabel (Madrid)

Marion Peter Holt

While American audiences were being inundated with new stage and film treatments of the cliché-encrusted Sapin of Bizet's *Carmen*—some of them admittedly ingenious—Lluis Pascual's impressive staging of Valle-Inclan's *Luces de Bohemia [Bohemian Lights],* jointly produced by the Centro Dramático Nacional and the Théâtre de l'Europe, was being seen in a number of European cities following its opening in Paris last spring. Its Madrid premiere had been expected in the 1983-84 season but was delayed until October by the extended run of the highly successful revival of Jardiel Poncela's *Eloísa está debajo de un almendro* at the CDN's main theatre.

The performance history of *Luces* is all too brief. It was never staged in Valle's lifetime; Jean Vilar's French production was seen in Paris in 1963; the play was finally presented in Madrid in 1971 after the Franco Ministry of Culture withdrew its objections to several hundred words of dialogue (all from the politicized scenes that Valle added in 1924 to his original version) that had been considered provocative. Given the rarity of stagings of *Luces* (or any Valle play), a new production becomes an event before it is unveiled. However, Pascual's treatment is no mere obligatory nod, as head of Spain's National Theatre, to his country's neglected theatrical visionary; it is an utterly convincing, if decidedly conceptaul and personal, realization of the work that literally defines (in the words of the dying Max Estrella in the famous Scene 12) and illustrates the dramatic form that Valle labeled the *esperpento.*

Rightly or wrongly, *Luces* has been called cinematic, and there are strong suggestions of the German expressionistic films of the 1920s in this staging. Actions are sometimes played out in silhouette against a white background, and the lighting turns the actors' faces into masks or obliterates their features, creating the effect of a shadow play. For the frequent scene changes required for the blind poet's movements from one locale to the next in his final hours, Fabia Puigserver has designed layers of interacting scrims that rise and fall silently and fluidly, with a disorienting effect not necessarily true to Valle's intent but nonetheless compelling as a

Ros Ribas

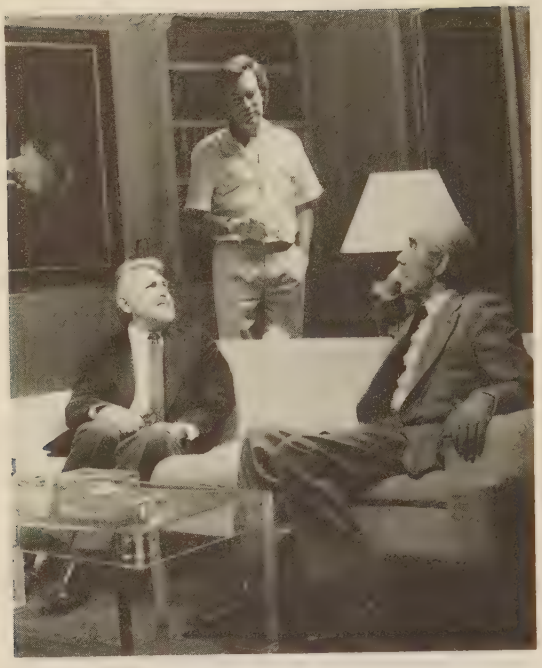
LUCES DE BOHEMIA

visual complement to the dramatic action. After Max's death, the scrims totally disappear to reveal the full expanse of the stage as the family and onlookers hover over the coffin.

At the heart of the production are the splendid performances of José María Rodero as Max and Carlos Lucena as Don Latino, both of whom set a standard by which future interpretations will be measured. Pascual has obviously instructed his supporting actors to exaggerate both gesture and speech to achieve grotesqueness or puppet-like movements. Occasionally the result is overplaying that becomes an exercise in self-indulgence, defeating the purpose that is clearly intended.

Lluis Pascual's *Luces de Bohemia* will probably not strike anyone familiar with Valle's highly descriptive and evocative stage directions as definitive, but it is nevertheless a strong affirmation of the talent of one of Europe's rising your directors and illustrative of the high production standards that prevail at the María Guerrero. It has also made accessible—as the fiftieth anniversary of Valle-Inclan's death (and Lorca's) approaches—to the widest audience ever one of the masterworks of twentieth century drama.

The only new Spanish play of substance on view in Madrid in a fall season dominated by American and British imports was Buero-Vallejo's *Diálogo secreto [Secret Dialogue]*, presented in a commercial house but with a modest subsidy from the Ministry of Culture to underwrite its staging.



Aleantara

DIALOGO SECRETO

The metaphorical use of an individual struggle against a physical limitation to illustrate a larger moral or political struggle is fundamental to a number of Buero's plays, and in *Diálogo secreto* he focuses on the predicament of a daltonic, or colorblind, art critic, who must finally deal with the consequences of his elaborate deception when a negative review he has written triggers the suicide of a young artist. An eerie scenic transformation has been devised to creat the immersion-effects that are the hallmark of Buero's theatre. A focal point of the set is a reproduction of Velazquez's "The Spinners," which fades to black and white, along with the abutting shelves of art books (all projections), in the scenes reflecting the inner world of the sensorially deprived critic. Essential to the play's development are the intriguing personal interactions of the characters with the painting, giving to the art object the same function that Goya's Black Paintings serve in *The Sleep of Reason.*

Unfortunately, director Pérez Puig has elected to stage this essentially anti-naturalistic play as a conventionally realistic living-room drama. In an article published at the time of the premiere, he defended the elimination of some of the more strikingly anti-naturalistic elements of the original script to make the play more accessible to a wider audience (read middle-class, conservative audience). Similarly, the scenic designer has opted for subtle, almost unobtrusive, visual transformation where the dramatic substance of the play suggests a bolder assault on audiences' sensibilities.

The casting is also far from ideal, though Maria Luisa Merlo (as the wife) and Natalia Dicenta (as the teenage daughter) are consistently true to the

Buerian mode. The "test" scene, in which the daughter paints her face green to confirm her suspicions about her father's colorblindness, and the wife's final desperate monologue, addressed to her unseen husband, remain indelible theatrical experiences. Manuel Tejada, in the potentially searing role of the critic, and Carlos Lemos as his father affect a monotonous deliver that almost negates their scenes together. The fifth character, that of an aging alcoholic revolutionary, was originally played by veteran actor Ismael Merlo, who died shortly after a performance early in the run of the play. Pastor Serrador now performs the part adequately, if somewhat too casually.

Dialogo secreto is Buero-Vallejo's finest play of recent years, and even in this conservative staging the dramatic thrust is evident, as is its powerful indictment of hypocrisy. In some future production, overseen by a more daring team, the potential impact of its non-verbal effects may yet be realized.

The Possessed
A Dramatic Adaptation of Dostoyevsky's Novel
Directed by Yuri Lyubimov
The Almeida Theatre Company (London)

Rosette Lamont

Yuri Lyubimov's adaptation of Dostoyevsky's novel *The Possessed* (also known as *The Devils*) is his first creation outside of Russia. Prior to being stripped of his Soviet nationality, Lyubimov worked on his version of *The Possessed* for seven years. It is unlikely that the play would ever have passed censorship and been given a production at the Taganka.

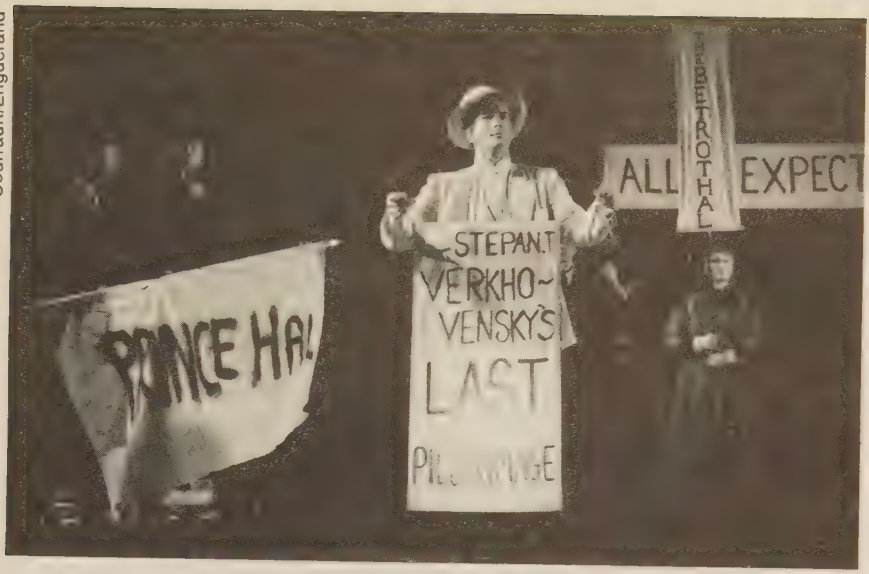
The Possessed is Dostoyevksy's eerily prophetic political vision of the transformation of ideals into tyrannical ideology. This perversion of a potentially noble utopian dream is accomplished by Peter Verkhovensky, a demonic revolutionary who has surrounded himself with a retinue of fools, murderers, cowards to achieve his own bid for power by violence and deceit. Verkhovensky's fatal flaw is his choice of the elusive, haunted aristocrat, Nicholas Stavrogin, as the leader of a future uprising. Stavrogin will not let himself be used, preferring to take his own life rather than enter into any kind of inauthentic conspiracy. Equally capable of crime and sacrifice, the Byronic Stavrogin remains a solitary Lucifer, the symbol of an unchanneled, self-destroying energy, a force which propels him simultaneously to heroic and darkly evil deeds. The minor characters in the novel are almost as important as the protagonists: Kirillov, the pre-existentialist thinker, who affirms his individual freedom by taking his own life, a God-like

victory—as he sees it—over his overwhelming fear of death; Shatov, who condemns himself to liquidation, assassination, by leaving his erstwhile friends, the revolutionary conspirators, because he has come to believe in Russia's Orthodox Christian mission; the grotesque, fawning yet violent Lebyadkin, a Falstaff to Stavrogin's King Hal; Lebyadkin's crippled, half-demented sister, Maria, Stavrogin's secret wife.

An atheistic socialist in his youth, Dostoyevsky underwent a spiritual crisis during his imprisonment and his subsequent Siberian exile. *The Possessed* is less a work of fiction than an apocalyptic novel-pamphlet, an exposé of the dangers of unbridled, unprincipled radicalism. Dostoyevsky's extraordinarily accurate vision of the future upheavals in his land came from his acquaintance with nihilists and terrorists nurtured in the West. Shatov's murder, for example, was inspired by Netchaieff's killing of the student Ivanov. Verkhovensky's program mirrors Bakunin's organization of secret "national brothers" and his "Y." Like the author of *God and the State*, Verkhovensky preaches strict solidarity between a small group of a dozen individuals tied to one another by their enforcement of blind obedience on the part of the rest of their followers. Plotting and counterplotting is the basic principle of these "underground" types. They are, as Albert Camus stated in program notes to his own brilliant adaptation of *The Possessed*, "torn, dead souls, incapable of love and mourning their impotence, wanting to believe yet unable to do so, like so many of our contemporaries."

Lyubimov's spectacle also focuses on Dostoyevsky's vision of a future police state. Less philosophical than Camus's adaptation, Lyubimov's expressionistic enactment is a personal comment on the society he was finally forced to leave. Lyubimov has brought Dostoyevsky's novel upon the stage in a single set which does away with time sequence and the linear continuity of the reading experience in favor of simultaneity and a total symbolic image. The stage is bare except for a battered old piano and the placards, banners, signs which will be carried by the actors to announce scene changes. The signs have all been taken from the titles of various chapters or sections of the novel: The Sins of Others, The Fatal Morning, The Betrothal, The Wise Serpent, A Long Night's Work, Prince Ivan, Prince Hal, Our Group, All in Expectation, The Fete, Stepan Verkhovensky's Last Pilgrimage. When a number of placards are held up at once by the black-clad, invisible actors, the effect is that of leafing through Dostoyevsky's novel, or perhaps turning the pages in our mind which holds the book as a whole.

Stefanos Lazaridis has surrounded the stage space with a semi-circular black curtain which appears at first to be made of a single piece of cloth but is actually composed of long stripes of material. Throughout the play, heads, masked faces, limbs, signs keep on peering and appearing in between the slits in the curtain. Thus, with the help of his set designer, Lyubimov emphasizes the fact that not a single conversation, or encounter



Courrault/Enguerand

THE POSSESSED

can take place without the ubiquitous presence of spies, investigators, *agents provocateurs,* would-be assassins. It is the perfect symbol for the police state.

David Cunningham's lighting is also part and parcel of the ominous atmosphere: fractured glass, the slow spinning of chromotrope effects, the sudden intrusion of beams of light hitting the stage from both sides. Lyubimov's spectacle is marked by constant changes, shifts, the grimacing reflections of a symbolic landscape.

To bring to the stage his personal vision of Dostoyevsky's novel, Lyubimov uses an aesthetic derived from the Meyerholdian emphasis upon gestural language. Corporal plasticity for Lyubimov, as for Meyerhold, must correspond to the inner emotion pursued by Stanislavsky and the Moscow Art Theatre. There is nothing pleasing or pretty about Lyubimov's staging. He conveys his sense of horror by the use of grotesque, exaggerated movements, piercing voices, shouts and cries, masks, puppets, alternating darkness and dazzling light. The unifying principle is timing, rhythm. In rehearsal, Lyubimov often shouts in Italian: "Tempo! Tempo!" The use of music is an important element; the actor and the background music are fused as though sound brought the actor to life.

The Prologue sets the tone of the play as all the actors writhe in a kind of St. Vitus dance, demons or human beings possessed by evil spirits. They intone the words of Pushkin's famous poem, "The Devils," the source of Dostoyevsky's title for his novel: ". . . the Devil's leading / round in circles . . . his eyes flare at me! / Devils, many / more devils, / dance, howl, / Hell's

revels . . . Cries to make / the heart break." It is as though the quiet, all-pervasive insanity of Nicholas Stavrogin and Peter Verkhovensky's ruthless ambition had unleashed a tidal wave ready to wash over the whole town.

Another important aspect of Lyubimov's spectacle is his use of the subtext. He has picked up the many references to Shakespeare and Goethe's *Faust* in Dostoyevsky's text and brought them to the fore. His Stavrogin is a Prince Hal who will never mature into a heroic king, and Lebyadkin is a funny if joyless Falstaff. Verkhovensky is the Mephistopheles of the play.

Lyubimov's *Possessed* achieves an extraordinary intensity. The director would have preferred not to interrupt the play by having an intermission. His solution, however, is very original. Since Part I ends with Stavrogin's visit to the holy man, Bishop Tikhon, Lyubimov introduces at that point the infamous "Confession" in which the young aristocrat states that while living in Petersburg he seduced and caused the death of an eleven-year-old girl. Stavrogin's printed declaration is to be published. Part I ends with all the actors coming out through the slits in the curtain. They move silently, ominously towards the audience. Each one holds a flashlight and a copy of the printed pamphlet which they read as they walk. Meanwhile, copies of the confession are distributed to the members of the audience to be consulted during the intermission.

Lyubimov suggests that the traditional break is saved from being an empty void, a time for meaningless chatter. It can be put to use by the audience which will be intimately connected to the most secret, most terrifying chapter in Dostoyevsky's novel, the one that was excised for many years. When they return to their seats, the play picks up where it stopped: Stavrogin is still sitting in Tikhon's cell, listening to the holy man telling him that his confession could be of value if he were able to accept the scorn of his readers, their judgment of him.

What makes Lyubimov's production so complex is that his adaptation is in no way linear. Unlike many other stage adaptations of this novel, it does not follow the plot or action. Lyubimov has taken the various scenes which haunted his imagination and given them his own order. He has treated *The Possessed* as a wild, ironic, prophetic farce, "a dishevelled Farandole, a whirlwind," as he himself describes it.

Rosette Lamont is a contributing editor of PAJ.

Bettina Knapp's most recent book is Word/Image/Psyche.

Marion Peter Holt is the editor of the forthcoming PAJ title, DramaContemporary: Spain, *a collection of four recent Spanish plays.*

Arthur Holmberg is a contributing editor of PAJ.

Vietnamese Water Puppets

Trần Văn Khê

Adapted and translated from the French by Phillipa Wehle

A form with its roots in the tenth century, "Múa Rối Nuóc" is today the only water puppet theatre in the world. Yet until recently, this unique form of theatrical expression was virtually unknown outside of the few villages along the Red River Delta in North Vietnam where it has been practiced for hundreds of years during feast days and seasonal celebrations. The "Múa Rối Nuóc" was brought to France and Italy in March of 1984 through the auspices of La Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris and La Maison de la Culture de la Seine-Saint-Denis.

The "Múa Rối Nuốc," or "Puppet Dances on Water," are shows put on by a small number of village "corporations" or "societies" composed of peasants and farmers who continue to carry on the secret traditions of making and manipulating puppets handed down to them by their forefathers.

Preparations for puppet performances are painstaking and elaborate. Stages are built in the middle of selected ponds; a complex system of stakes strung with wires is set up and wooden puppets representing a large variety of characters are readied for the re-enactment of as many as 200 different scenes or stories concerning the trades and leisure activities of village life, interspersed with visitations from supernatural beings and creatures (fairies, dragons, unicorns and the like).

Philippa Wehle

I. THE WATER PUPPETS

The "Múa Rối Nuóc" are unlike any other puppets (hand, string or rod) used in theatrical presentations. They are generally about 16 inches high but some, for example, those of the Nguyen Puppet Theatre in the Thai Binh province, are much larger: their fairy puppet is 2-3/4 feet high and their large fish is 3-1/2 feet long.

Each puppet is composed of two parts: the body (*thân*) which is seen above water, and the "support" or base (*dè*) which is under water. They are simple in appearance (only the head and the arms are movable; the legs are either fixed or replaced altogether by cotton pants or a large skirt). Both the body and the support are usually made of a single piece of wood although cloth is used for serpents and dragons. The puppets are multi-colored, and protected with a vegetable base paint which gives them a distinctive lacquered look.

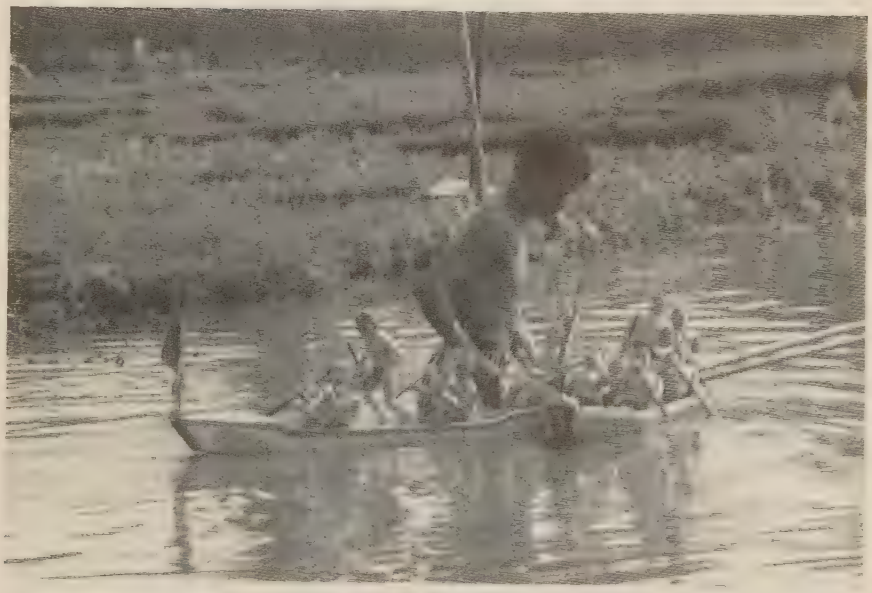
They represent a wide range of characters: peasant laborers, woodsmen, boatmen and fisherman, robust wrestlers, nasty looking highwaymen and brave warriors; humble peasants culling rice or playing village games; graceful dancers, and real and mythical animals, from fish, ducks and foxes to phoenixes and unicorns fighting over a ball of silk.

The most beautiful puppet of all, however, is Tếu, the Presenter, the indispensable leader of the show. A jolly, fat peasant, bald but for three tufts of hair and naked but for a vest and a G-string, he's the character who jokes with the audience and acts the buffoon while the chorus urges him to "get on with the show."

II. METHODS OF MANIPULATION

There are three methods of operating the water puppets. Some are simply attached to a long bamboo pole (*sao*), dipped in the water and pulled out again by a manipulator located behind a sliding curtain. The large puppets are attached to a round-shaped wooden disc which serves as a float attached to the bamboo poles. These floats often have rudders as well. Other large puppets are also attached to bamboo poles but they have a round-shaped wooden disc which serves as a float. These may also have rudders which help the manipulator guide the puppet through the water. A more complex system of manipulation has the pole attached to the puppet by means of wires threaded through the float and connected to different parts of the puppet's body. These wires are made of copper, silk, flax or twisted hairs. They are covered with a layer of beeswax to make them waterproof. The operator moves the puppets back and forth with the pole while his fingers control the arms and head with slow, gently flowing movements.

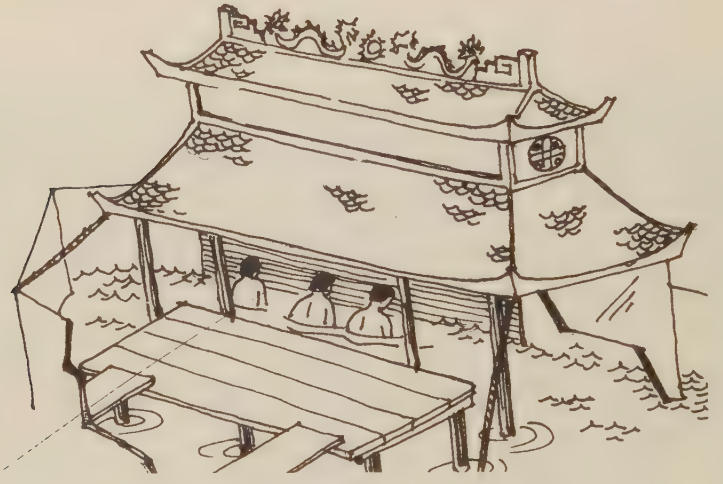
OPERATORS AND PUPPETS



MAY DAY, ROPE MECHANISM

Sometimes three poles are used with the puppet attached to the middle one while two metallic rods support the puppet's hands on the right and left poles. In other cases, an ingenious system of wires replaces the poles altogether. Stakes are driven into the bottom of the performance pond and wires are strung between the stakes. These lead to a central operating board placed behind a screen made of bamboo slats which is on the main stage. This system gives the puppeteers a chance to operate more than one puppet at a time which is necessary for such "show-stopping" numbers as "the dance of the immortals," the unicorn ballet, the naval battle and the offering of betel leaf to the audience.

Specific methods of water puppet manipulation are well-kept family secrets, however, handed down from father to son. In fact they are so carefully protected that the eldest son of the "director" of one water puppet theatre could not marry the girl he loved because she was a member of a rival theatre group.



DRAWING OF BACKSTAGE AREA

III. THE STAGE

Although there are natural ponds on which performances have taken place for many years, a portable water basin has become standard whenever a performance is given in a non-traditional space. Sometimes existing temples serve as the stage but a masonry structure must be built behind which the manipulator can operate the puppets. The stage is located in the middle of the pond or basin; its sides must be at least 9-1/2 feet long. It is rectangular in shape and divided into three compartments. The middle com-

partment or room is larger than the other two and is covered by two roofs, one above the other, supported by 16 columns. The puppets are kept on the floor of the two side rooms which are above the water's surface. Musicians play from here as well.

The floor of the central room is below water. Here, the manipulators sit with their legs, arms and the lower parts of their bodies under water. They manipulate the puppets from behind a curtain made of small bamboo slats. It is painted red and has dragons, phoenixes and other fabulous animals on it. It is hung from the roof and reaches down to the water's edge. The manipulators can see the stage, puppets and the audience through the spaces in the slats. But the audience can see only the silhouettes of the puppeteers from their side of the curtain. Occasionally the operators sing or speak but most often vocalists, seated next to them, perform these roles.

The Water Puppet Theatres of North Vietnam frequently perform in neighboring villages as well as their own. For this reason, they have devised transportable "performance rooms," made of braided bamboo. Their roofs, also made of braided bamboo, are painted red with white edges in imitation of the tile roofs of the masonry structures described above.

DRAGON BALLET PUPPETS IN ONE OF THE SIDE ROOMS
OF THE PERFORMANCE SPACE

IV. THE PUPPETEERS

With the exception of the artists in the national Water Puppet Theatre, water puppet operators are not professionals. They are peasants, farmers who put on puppet shows for their villages after cultivating their fields, or between sowing and harvesting their rice paddies. They learn the art by joining a "corporation" observing the master puppeteers, helping to sculpt and

paint the puppets, and setting up the "machinery" for each show. Their first try at manipulation is with the simple bamboo pole puppets. They acquire skill and dexterity very slowly because there are no rehearsals, only the attentive observation of the master's work.

The art of water puppet manipulation is now taught at the National Puppet Institute, but in the case of several "corporations," some special numbers are still not divulged. Only the inventor of these scenes and his closest relatives can produce them. The manual dexterity of these artists is legendary. They have never used their art to earn a living. They are rice growers, fishermen and craftsmen.

Traditionally, acceptance into one of these "corporations" has not been an easy matter. Each year, when the corporations meet to commemorate their ancestors or patrons, the candidates who have been judged worthy must bring offerings of betel and rice alcohol to the members. The decision to accept a candidate has to be unanimous. New members then swear they will keep the secrets of the corporation and pay their dues. Members of a corporation are not necessarily puppeteers. Many are simply "friends." Some corporations may have as many as 100 members, but only 25 to 30 percent of them know how to operate the puppets.

Each corporation has a "leader" (*ông trùm*) whose responsibility is to make and maintain the puppets, prepare the shows, administer the finances (dues and gifts) and test the new candidates. He may have several assistants but he is the "executive director" and usually the best artist of the corporation.

Members of a corporation gain little or no financial benefit from the corporation since Water Puppet Shows are free of charge. But bonds of solidarity between members are very strong and practical help is available in the event of need or misfortune.

V. PERFORMANCES

Water is of course the essential element in a Water Puppet Show. Not only do the puppets advance and retreat on the water, but their reflections in the water which also reflects the blue sky and swaying trees along the banks of the pond lends the performance a special aura.

Fishing scenes, naval battles, water-spouting dragons and tortoises all seem more realistic in this aquatic setting. Water amplifies the sounds of the drums, cymbals and fire crackers as well. The water represents the tilled earth in the plowing scenes, a river full of fish in the fishing scenes or a huge waterway in the naval battle scenes.

Also, the muddy water of the performance pond conceals the poles, wires,

CHU TEU

SETTING THE "IMMORTALS" UP

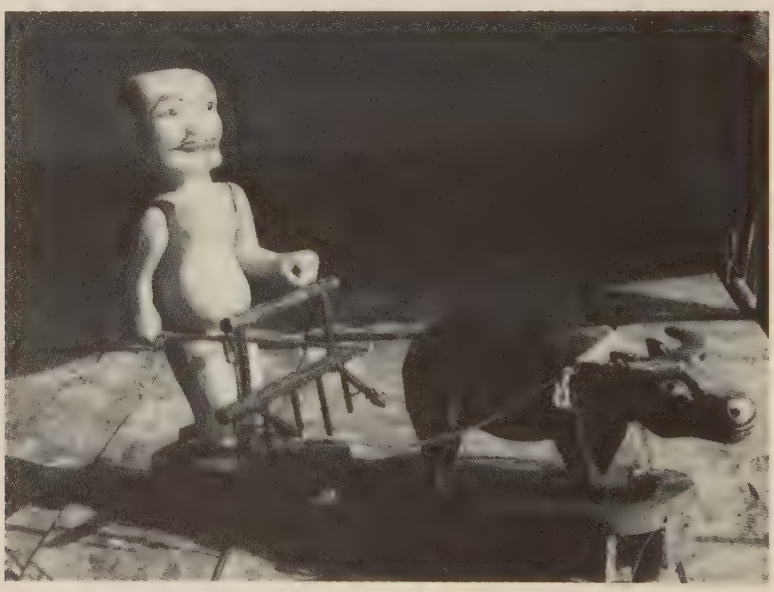
stakes and other mechanisms used to produce "surprise numbers" like the one with a young maiden astride a fish who brings betel leaf on a tray to the spectators at the other end of the pond.

In preparation for each performance, stakes, wire systems and other necessary structures are set up throughout the night. No one is allowed to see them (in one village a guard didn't hesitate a minute to cut off the hand of a fellow whose curiosity had got the better of him).

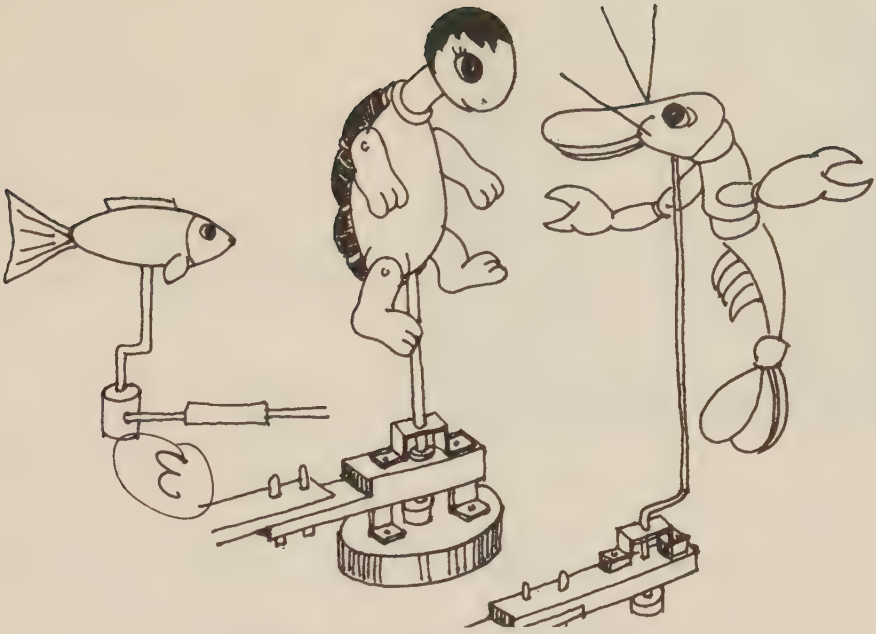
The next day, there is much excitement around the village pond. Peasants, craftsmen, shopkeepers, men, women, young people and old gather while drums, gongs and other popular instruments urge the spectators to the three sides of the pond where they will watch the show. Suddenly, Tếu appears from behind the bamboo screen on the stage. He begins:

"Oh my brothers!
"What's the matter?" the chorus asks.
"I used to live in the medicinal plant garden of Heaven. Everyone called me Vong. Then, when water and fire got together, they gave me the name of Teu in this theatre company."

Teu teases the audience, making the chorus impatient. They urge him to get down to the business at hand. Finally, he goes over to the fire crackers hung on poles in the middle of the pond and lights them. They sputter and crackle while the chorus announces that the flags are about to be hoisted. These suddenly rise up from the water, arriving at the top of their masts



THE FARMER



DRAWING OF PUPPET MECHANISM

already completely dry. The drum rolls intensify. A dragon slides across the water; two unicorns battle and the Phoenix Bird spreads its wings while a tortoise throws its head about.

Out comes a fisherman; he's caught a fish which dangles at the end of his line. Another has caught several fish which flail about in his net. Numerous scenes follow: frog hunting, silk weaving, men playing on a see-saw, others raising ducks. The Water Puppet repertory is quite vast and varied. A performance usually includes a minimum of 20 scenes, a maximum of 30. The most popular among them are "the hoisting of the flags," "the fishing scene," "Têu's number," "frog hunting," "a wrestling match," "the dance of the four legendary animals," and the "Dance of the Immortals." The characters in these scenes represent village inhabitants, peasants, or fishermen for the most part. Gods, "immortals," are rare. Emotions and complex feelings are not shown.

VI. MUSIC

Music plays a secondary role in the Water Puppet shows although the major drummer is especially indispensable. He announces the show, underscores the declaimed or sung parts and accompanies the most animated scenes. A wooden drum and a small gong complete the percussion section. Chants or songs include a variety of vocal expressions; declamations and popular songs, among others.

The main interest in these shows is visual. Frequently a scene is introduced

A DANCER'S FACE

by a text in verse or prose, but for the most part, the public is watching rather than listening.

VII. THE DIFFERENT WATER PUPPET THEATRES OF NORTH VIETNAM

The traditions of water puppet theatre, handed down from generation to generation since the tenth-century Ly dynasty, have been preserved by a number of companies and corporations as well as by the artists of the National Puppet Theatre of Vietnam.

There are 16 companies in the seven provinces and regions of Northern Vietnam. Four are in the Ha Son Binh province alone; two of them are quite famous: the Thach Xa and the Yen Thon. The Thach Xa company, for example, used to give its performances from 1:00 p.m. on into the evening. At least 2,000 spectators attended the performances.

In the province of Thai Binh, the Nguyen Puppet Theatre is equally famous with its repertory of over forty numbers (some of them quite recent, such as the "People's Class to Combat Illiteracy"). In the Hanoi region, the Dao Thuc Puppet Theatre, which offers some twenty repertory numbers, is famous for the artistic beauty of its puppets.

The National Puppet Theatre of Vietnam, created in 1956 by Ho Chi Minh, has presented numerous programs of string, rod and water puppets. Despite a limited budget, it also promoted research about the history of puppets. In June 1978, the Ministry of Culture of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam created a major Puppet Center where performances, research and training of puppeteers take place so that age-old traditions such as the Water Puppet Theatre can be preserved as well as renewed.

Excerpts from Marionettes sur eau du Vietnam *are published here by permission of Cherif Khaznadar, director of Maison des Cultures du Monde (Paris).*

ALBERTO SAVINIO

and

THE TEATRO METAFISICO

Mel Gordon

More than twenty-five years after his death in 1952, Alberto Savinio has suddenly reappeared throughout Italy as a national symbol of twentieth-century modernist culture. Just as Surrealism, Expressionism, and Futurism became successive collective terms in the post-war years to describe a wide variety of conflicting European art movements and literary trends, now Savinio's "Metafisica" is the latest aesthetic rubric for Italy's between-the-wars avant-garde. Long overshadowed by his brother Giorgio de Chirico, Savinio has finally come into his own as an innovative artist, writer, composer, dramatist, and director. In fact, the most unusual aspect of Savinio's rediscovery are the ubiquitous three-to-seven page chronological listings of his career and works that fill every biography, catalogue, and article. It is as if the contemporary reader must be constantly reassured of Savinio's actual existence and range of activity.

Christened Andrea de Chirico, Savinio was born in 1891 into a middle-class Italian family residing in Athens. Like those of his older brother, Savinio's artistic iconography and themes were fueled by a magical and delimited childhood vocabulary of abandonment, the pre-dawn determination to escape, flight, confused and futile wanderings, the late afternoon realization of love's finiteness, and finally, a late and guilt-mired return. While both brothers showed early promise in graphic arts, and later in writing, Savinio's first love was music. At fifteen, after the family moved to Munich, Savinio had already completed a Wagner-inspired opera, *Camerla,* that Pietro Mascagni, the composer of *Cavalleria rusticana,* found highly praiseworthy.

In 1910 Savinio moved to Paris, where he continued to compose dramatic ballet pieces and strange operatic fragments. Joined by de Chirico the following year, the brothers made substantial progress, forming lasting contacts with Apollonaire and his followers at the prestigious journal, *Les Soirees de Paris.* More than any other time, 1914 became a hallmark year for Savinio and his artistic reputation. It began with his formal name change: Andrea de Chirico was now signing his music "Alberto Savinio, artisan dionysiaque." In the April issue of *Les Soirees de Paris,* Savinio's first theoretical statement appeared. Entitled "Drama and Music," he began to articulate a new idea in music, "Sincerisme"—a disharmonious system without any polytonality that would serve the theatre while remaining independent of the actions and emotions of the plays. Savinio attacked both the disciples of the banal *music dramatique* and the "pure music" school of the Viennese Arnold Schoenberg.

On May 24th, 1914 Savinio gave the first public recital of Sincerisme. It consisted of the following:

1] Dances from *The Treasure of Rampsenit*
(Opera-Bouffe by M.M.D. Calvocoressi)

2] *Two Loves in the Night*
(Ballet in 1 Act by Calvocoressi & Savinio)

3] *The Persian*
(Ballet in 1 Act by Mikhail Fokine)

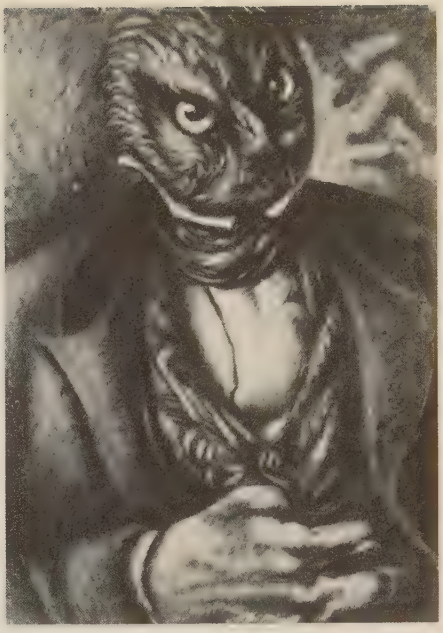
ACT I
The Sleep of the Negro
TABLEAU 2
Old Man Who Cries
TABLEAU 3
The Cracked Violin
ACT 2, TABLEAU 1
Cortege
The Dragon
ACT 3
Cortege
Dance of Archers
Dance of Andromede
The Petrification

4] *Niobe*
(Dramatic ballet by Calvocoressi)

According to the Parisian critics, Savinio's evening was a complete success. (In the *Paris-Journal,* Apollonaire hailed Savinio as the closest thing to a Tuscan Renaissance genius; one or two others found Savinio something of a musical dilettante.) Most impressive, however, was Savinio's own piano playing: by the end of the performance his piano was "smashed" and Savinio's fingers were quite bloody. Several theatrical projects between Savinio and Apollonaire were quickly planned—one ot be designed by de Chirico, another by Francis Picabia—but none was realized in those "dog days" of 1914.

In the July-August 1914 issue of *Les Soirees de Paris,* the final number, Savinio published his first "metaphysical" drama, *Songs of the Half-Dead.*

SELF-PORTRAIT



SELF-PORTRAIT (1936)

Like Wassily Kandinsky's *Yellow Sound,* written five years earlier, *Songs of the Half-Dead* mixed Symbolist and proto-Expressionist settings and character types. Filled with disturbing and violent actions, *Songs of the Half-Dead* later caused Antonin Artaud to include Savinio in his gallery of Theatre of Cruelty playwrights with Seneca, Shakespeare, Webster, and Strindberg. The description and Savinio's drawings of the central character, The Bald Man ("a man without voice, without eyes, without a face") was long thought to be de Chirico's main inspiration for the life-like dummies and mannikins that fill his mysterious paintings in the years beginning in 1914.

Whether or not Savinio's *Songs of the Half-Dead* was ever mounted is still a point of contention among Italian scholars. Savinio designed costumes and sets for it in the summer of 1914 but no clear record of a production exists. It is possible and even likely that a small—and unsuccessful—studio reading was given in August 1914. This would account for Savinio's costumes, sudden rewrite of the text, and fit into de Chirico's and Savinio's characteristic selective remembrances.

What is known is that de Chirico and Savinio returned to Italy in 1915 to serve in the army. After rejecting music as a complete art form during his war-time correspondence with the Italian Dadaists, Savinio continued to write and paint. Between 1917 and 1919, the Metafisica movement in art was coming into being. Concerned with the mysterious presence in daily

UNTITLED

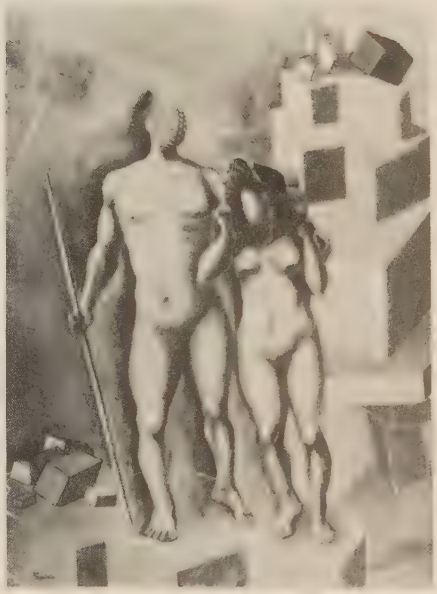
CAPOLETTERA "N" (1944)

SKETCH FOR THE
STRAVINSKY-COCTEAU
OEDIPUS REX (1948)

GUINONE E LATONA (1927)

L'ANNUNCIAZIONE (1932)

EDIPO E ANTIGONE



life, the chance meeting of objects, the ironic encounters with time, the mastery of form, the Metafisica movement found many adherents and patrons. It was sometimes thought of as "anti-Futurism." At first with Anton Bragaglia and later at Pirandello's Teatro d'Arte, Savinio created the Teatro Metafisico, a loosely knit group of poets, playwrights, designers, and actors—many of them refugees from the Futurist theatre and the so-called Teatro Grotesco. Lasting only four years, 1922 to 1926, Savinio's group was short-lived and of little influence. Savinio staged or assisted in directing only three of his works in those years: *Captain Ulysses; Death of Niobe,* a "tragic mime" with de Chirico's sets; and the *Ballet of the Seasons.*

Not until after the Second World War did Savinio return to the theatre, when he became a leading designer for La Scala. Before that he had established himself as a leading experimental painter and writer during the fascist period in Italy. In addition to set design and direction, Savinio's newest plays and ballets achieved a certain popularity in the last years of his life. (His later plays include *Alcesti di Samuele* and the monologue *Emma B. Vedova Giocasta,* both written in 1949.) In 1952, he directed Gioacchino Rossini's *Armida* for the Florence May Festival. A few days after its opening, Savinio died of heart failure.

Mel Gordon's book Lazzi: Comic Routines of the Commedia dell'Arte *was published by PAJ Publications.*

Songs of the Half-Dead

(Dramatic Scenes from Risorgimento Episodes)

Alberto Savinio

Translated by Christopher Bourseiller and Kathy Trageser

Characters:

The Bald Man; The Yellow Man; Daisyssina; The Mother of Pierre (The Yellow Man); Wrought-Iron Men; Two Angels . . .; A Mad King; The Hit-Men; A Boy; Statues; A Voice.

Set and costumes by the author.

THE EPISODE

Before the curtain rises, a gunshot, a scream, silence . . .

The curtain rises.

A red place. A wall. A house with a single window, revealing a burning candle in a silver chandelier. Total night, but the sky is blue. The Bald Man is lying on the ground. Some armed Hit-Men are situated on either side of the wall. (The position of their hearts is indicated by painted red hearts.) Some black Wrought-Iron Men pass by, crawling along the length of the wall as they grunt. A continuous rumbling of a drum can be heard.

Rolling in contortions and twisted by horrible stomach cramps, the Wrought-Iron Men cover the Bald Man with a heavy coat. Buckling at the knees and moaning, they exit.

Suddenly the Bald Man's arm throws off the blanket. He holds a lamp that gives off a blinding light.

A horrible sound of linens tearing is heard. Immediately the rolling of drums ceases. Silence.

A VOICE: (From a megaphone.) Finally, Monsieur Burnes, will you reveal to which port the "Santa Barbara" is headed?

Sailors' song. The song of deliverance.

Sound of unlatched springs. The Hit-Men stretch out their iron arms. Then, rigidly, they perform Swedish gymnastics.

(*Curtain.*)

TOWER SCENE

The set has two levels.

The upper level: a tapering bedroom at the top of a tower. It appears to be the inside of a ship. Two windows, like portholes, open to the cold, hard sky. Skylights. Scarlet carpet. A black drapery divides the room. In the background, a cumbersome bed like a platform is concealed by some curtains.

The lower level: the interior of the tower. A stone staircase. Near the ground, a square entry through which can be seen the masts of a schooner. In the center, the equestrian statue of a king. There are a few other statues around. Large inactive machines—with wheels and pistons.

Through the portholes enter Two Lost Angels. They meet in the middle of the bedroom, where they kneel like the guardians of the tomb.

A door opens behind the drapery. The Angels wail softly. Daisyssina enters, followed by the Yellow Man who, pushed by the invisible god of love, walks ecstatically. Daisyssina opens the bedroom curtains and sees the Bald Man, who jumps behind the wallhanging.

Daisyssina stretches out on the bed. The Yellow Man emits a howl.

THE YELLOW MAN: (*Running in circles.*)
Death! Death! Gentle, scorching, fresh.
As a child, I used to be haunted by the nightmare of innocence.
Ah! The marvelous bed.
I sleep.
My heart is flowing away.
My soul, a tube of crystal, slips between my fingers.
Turn, turn, turn spiral.
The axis of the spinning top runs through my body.
All the hoops have closed upon themselves.
There, the center, the red mark attracts like a magnet . . .
The bones have dissolved,
I am nothing but blood.

THE BALD MAN: (*Hidden.*) Here is a man who imagines himself dying because he is assaulted by voluptuousness.

THE YELLOW MAN: (*In a terrible cry.*) Daisyssina!

The Yellow Man collapses on the bed. The Bald Man closes the curtains. Darkness. Moaning. Cries of pain. From the outside comes a burst of noisy military music. An artillery salute. The Bald Man quickly descends the stairs, carrying a lamp. Not a sound comes from the bed. Silence.

Knocking at the door. A sob. Holding a candle, a Small Boy in a nightshirt enters. With the bottom of his slipper, he crushes a spider that was crawling on the wall. Trembling, he watches the squashed beast moving an antenna. A siren sounds.

A VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Genova! Genova!

The Bald Man climbs up the stairs. The Mother of the Yellow Man follows. When they reach the bedroom, the Bald Man draws the curtains and discovers the Yellow Man and Daisyssina asleep. The Bald Man gives the Mother a steel lancet with a wooden handle that is attached to an electric wire. The Mother plunges the lancet into Daisyssina's breast . . .

A brief greenish flash of light. Daisyssina does not open her eyes or scream. Instead, she lifts her arms, arises from the bed, and falls back dead.

The Statues at the bottom level of the tower begin to move. The bronze horse that the King rides starts to gallop on its pedestal. The King pulls its reins.

The Yellow Man moans in his sleep. The Mother sets a wooden pot of sunflowers in the middle of the room. She sits in a chair and softly accompanies herself on the guitar.

THE MOTHER: (*Singing.*)
Ah! Nino! Learn about my suffering!

(*Screaming in rage.*)

You, daughter of a whore,
Daughter of a painted woman,
You wanted to take him from me!

(*Great crash on the strings; then a burst of laughter.*)

Tra la la la la,
Love is a pity.

(*Pathetic chords.*)

Beautiful morning: pif! paf! shot your poor father.
Lorenzo! Lorenzo!
The sun in the bedroom,
The white sheet,
The cooling polenta.

(*Tragic music.*)

Toc! Toc! Three gentlemen in the antechamber,
Pale, black frock-coats and tall hats.
Guiseppino! Guiseppino!

(*With rage.*)

Ah! Daughter of dogs, you have taken my little Jesus!
Ah! Daughter of wolves, you have taken the joy of my breasts!
Ah! Daughter of jackals, you have taken my little heart, my little belly!
Was it for you that I gave him my blood to drink?

(*She takes a long bow.*)

Gracious death, thank you!

One of the Angels appears at the window. The Bald Man grabs a huge sunflower and hits the Angel over the head. The Angel falls dead on the parapet. The Yellow Man complains and groans much louder. He makes anguished gestures that show he is having a nightmare.

The Mother continues to sing gently. The Bald Man lights two huge candles which he places on the sides of the portholes—night has come. He goes out and slowly descends the stairs.

The Yellow Man cries out terribly. He raises his hands.

THE YELLOW MAN: (*Calling out.*) Mama! Mama!

The Mother sings more loudly, anguished, now with joy.

The Yellow Man awakes and jumps out of bed. He shows no surprise at Daisyssina's death. He lifts her up in his arms and places her on a chair.

The Mother has retired to the back of the room. She is no longer singing.

The Yellow Man arranges the body of Daisyssina. He would like to believe she is alive. He places her head against the back of the chair and puts some sunflowers in her hands and hair. He begins to dance around her body. He is overtaken by madness.

From the rear, the Mother watches him and cries.

At the climax of his insanity, the Yellow Man leaps on his Mother and kills her.

The Mother shrinks. Soon, she seems to be nothing more than a great doll of stone.

The Yellow Man looks at her. He is moved. He cries. He calls to her. He begins to play with the doll, embracing it, rocking it. He throws it to the ceiling and catches it. He throws it to the ground and tramples it. Great bursts of laughter.

The night is very black. The two candles burn strangely at the windows.

VOICE OF THE PANIC-STRICKEN KING: (*Offstage.*) Ah! Extinguish the lighthouse's beacon if you don't want to see me die!

Through the square opening at the base of the tower shines the circular beam from the lighthouse. The beams rotate at regular intervals.

Panic-stricken, the King enters. With pale hands, he places a crown on his head. Several times he circles the chivalric statue and runs out a burst. Bewildered, the Yellow Man falls flat on his face onto the scarlet carpet.

A VOICE: (*Offstage.*) Vittorio Emmanuele, King of Italy.

A cannon is fired, very far from the wall. A siren sounds. Silence.

The huge black machines shudder. They start to run. The enormous wheels turn ominously, rolled up in leather belts. The pistons jump in jerks and plunge back into their steel casings.

The Bald Man arrives near the large window, where the masts of the schooners are framed.

A flash from the lighthouse.

THE BALD MAN: (*Immobile and his arms akimbo, gravely sings the "Song of the Night."*)
People of the city, it is night, the stars . . .

(*A flash from the lighthouse.*)

Now, I am ready for you, my soul. The time has come.
Courage! . . . Courage!
Go to the same level of the water to sit down near the fountains,
To sing in the distance, to count your money.
I stay, man without a face,
With the burden of my jaded flesh.
Ah, goddamn it! It is the half-dead.
But give me some tears, give me some cries . . .
I hold my hand out.

(*A flash from the lighthouse.*)

O frightening landscape, iron vegetation,
Come back, you, my THING from the other night.
You had a strange body, sad like a machine,
Complicated being, bizarre animal.

O woman! Woman of my nostalgia!
Suns made like copper flowers,
Worlds without form, soundless cities,
Creamy light where the severe birds
Used to furrow, harrassed.
Rising up from everywhere, you had existence
Only as long as you had passion, joy, pain, desire . . .
Suddenly you were a house—STONE OF HOPE—
My hands grew soft while trying to take hold of you.

(*A flash from the lighthouse.*)

The moment is born again. Time for farewells.
The metal birds stretch their rigid wings,
The statues march in step,
The fountains are dried up.
We see the vast and silent places,
The steel sentries passing again and again,
The great machines run, mysteriously,
Without fuel or noise.
The palm tree of the "SAMARITAN" stoops to the water
And there is no wind.

(*A flash from the lighthouse.*)

So, let us leave each other without a word, my soul . . . courage!
Farewell . . . the springs are silent.
Me, I am also a dead angel.
People of the city, it is night, the stars.
I am alone:
Mistrusted, beaten, I abandon myself
Without force into terrible hands and pains . . .
Have pity on me!

(*A flash from the lighthouse.*)

CURTAIN

The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture
Edited by Hal Foster
Bay Press, 175 pp., $8.95 (paper)

The Anti-Aesthetic is a provocative collection of essays which have been collected in an effort to elucidate the terms of "postmodernism," a term signifying "the state of contemporary culture." The writers included are an eclectic group, with perspectives of extensive diversity: Jurgen Harbermas, Kenneth Frampton, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp, Craig Owens, Gregory L. Ulmer, Fredric Jameson, Jean Baudrillard, and Edward W. Said. The question raised by this collection is whether or not the aspirations of "modernism" as a philosophical and a cultural adversary have evolved or devolved now that "modernism" has entered "the academy," and has, in fact, become "the academy." In this situation, the strategems for continued discourse, as defined in terms of analytic practice, must become either more stringent or more sedate.

One of the problems with modernist discourse, as exemplified, perhaps, in such critics and such philosophers as Clement Greenberg, Michael Fried and Stanley Cavell, was the tendency to prescribe; in an attempt to defuse the modernist distinction, the essays in *The Anti-Aesthetic* assert the explication of ideological constructs through the specificity of aesthetic projects. In a sense, the essays in *The Anti-Aesthetic* exemplify a mode of postmodernism by specifying theory in terms of criticism, that is, collapsing the categorical imperatives such that the terms fuse in the particularities of practice.

Postmodernism presupposes the necessity for pluralism in terms of aesthetics: rarely is work "criticized," rather, work is comprehended. (Perhaps the most important instance of an enterprise which might be considered the precursor of postmodern theory would be the "criticism" of Jean-Paul Sartre, especially *Saint Genet* and *The Idiot of the Family*.) The enterprises of architecture (in Kenneth Frampton's essay, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance"), of

sculpture (in Rosalind Krauss's essay, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field"), and of the visual arts (in Douglas Crimp's essay, "On the Museum's Ruins," and Craig Owens's essay, "The Discourse of Others: Feminists and Postmodernism") represent the most concentrated instances of postmodernism as cultural activities, and these essays have the added allure of a definitive address. (For example, when Fredric Jameson attempts to address the commercial cinema as an examplar of postmodernism in his essay "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," there is a marked attenuation of incisiveness, because the specifics of the situation have not the intent implied when the term "postmodern" is applied.) *The Anti-Aesthetic* is an exceptional beginning for a bibliography on postmodernism, though there are many other choices which come to mind (specifically from such journals as *October* and *Critical Inquiry*) for future reference (in particular, essays by such writers as Annette Michelson, Noel Carroll, and George Rochberg), to mention sources which Foster has tapped for his substantive choices. It should be noted that "performance" is a category which has been presumed to be "postmodern," yet few essays address the subject directly; theatre is rarely mentioned, and this is, perhaps, inevitable, since the theatre is a field which has not "expanded" in the same sense that architecture and sculpture have expanded. Postmodernism represents the effort to sustain the intensity of analytical discourse when there is an acknowledgement of the "death" of that discourse's modus operandi, "modernism." Perhaps when the theatre catches up to postmodernism, that will be the signal for postmodernism's funeral rites.

Daryl Chin

Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England
Martin Meisel
Princeton, 472 pp., 220 illus., $52.50 (cloth)

The visual high point in *The House of Mirth*, the play by Clyde Fitch and Edith Wharton, based on Mrs. Wharton's best-selling novel of 1905, is a striking scene of posing *tableaux vivants* at a New York society benefit. Noted in relation to Martin Meisel's remarkable survey of nineteenth-century English syntheses of the narrative and the pictorial—notably on stage—this theatrical effect of Fitch's, which was a hallmark of dramaturgy, shows his affinity for a style which was already in eclipse. In *Realizations*, Meisel seeks, with success and many fascinating, thoroughly researched examples, to identify and explain the distinctive nineteenth century style which linked the narrative and the pictorial. In passing, he notes *tableaux vivants*, said to have been developed from inspirations of Goethe and Emma Hamilton's "Attitudes," her poses based on classical sculpture.

Meisel is, however, interested in matters more complex than mere posing in

the manner of a famous painting, although such tableaux were indeed popular throughout the century, both at social gatherings and in the commercial theatre. Scene and act-endings, in fact, often were designed for striking tableaux effects. These were, Meisel demonstrates, practical results of applied aesthetics. Meisel's title refers to the term used in the theatre to indicate a specific pictorial representation of a literary text. He notes a distinction between *realization* and *illustration*. The former merely gives visual form to a text; the latter seeks to interpret it in the visual recreation.

What would Dickens have been without Cruikshank? What would Lewis Carroll have been without Sir John Tenniel? Even today, for many, their images are far better known than the texts they illustrate. Meisel observes that there was a definite, expected interaction between a text and its illustrations: the one was enhanced by the other. But even in novels not accompanied by specifically created illustrations, he says, the power of the pictorial made itself felt: fictional narratives were conceived and projected in series of scenes which were amply described and animated by their authors. And, just as the pictorial influence made itself felt in fiction, so too did the dominant narrative, or story-telling, tradition make itself felt, increasingly, in nineteenth-century English painting. Because of the necessary *stasis* of a painting, new means had to be developed to signify the on-going action of a story in a picture. Signification, in fact, is of major importance in Meisel's thesis about the relationship of narrative and pictorial elements, and their resounding union on the English stage.

For those theatre folk who are only interested in specifics, Meisel's book is rich with detailed examples of the ways in which nineteenth-century English theatre was influenced by the trends in art and literature. What is more, he documents the development over the century. It's a truism that the theatre, as a collaborative and a performance art, always lags behind new ideas and styles in the arts of painting, literature, and music, but Meisel shows the English theatre to have been almost immediately responsive in the last century, with some examples from France and Germany also included. A major reason for this ease of narrative and pictorial synthesis and of public acceptance of it on stage, Meisel convincingly demonstrates, was the accessibility and popularity of all three art-forms—fiction, painting, and theatre—something which is no longer the case.

Meisel quotes Charles Dickens's distinction between the *dramatic* and the *theatrical*, suggesting that the theatrical is often the strong, striking effect, such as the artificial final tableaux. As Naturalism and Realism began to drive artifice and melodrama from the stage, there was less and less need or desire for the merely and purely theatrical which had dictated much nineteenth-century dramaturgy. As befits so absorbing and interestingly written a narrative-pictorial thesis, Meisel has provided over two-hundred reproductions of paintings, engravings, prints, and sketches which are

quite as important as evidence and explanation as is his detailed text. In the book's generous margins are copious, information-packed notes, further illuminating the text. By any standards, this is a major work of interpretative scholarship. In the realm of theatre research, however, where relations or comparisons with the other arts are so seldom made at all, let alone to such brilliant advantage, this fine book will be a model—and a challenge.

Glenn Loney

Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964
Sally Banes
UMI Research Press, 270 pp.; $39.95 (cloth)

> *Any history of performance is fragmentary; the historian tries to assemble as many fragments as a collection of images, narratives, partial recollections, imperfect reminiscences, and a few scores.*

In the tradition of the best storytellers—who know how to get out of the way of the story—Sally Banes has written a refreshing and carefully documented history of Judson Dance Theatre, the seedbed of postmodern dance. She chronicles in detail the movement that began in 1962 in Robert Dunn's composition class at the Merce Cunningham studio, and ended in 1964 when the choreographers largely went their separate ways. She cites close to 200 dances and includes descriptions of many of them. Interwoven with the accounts of concerts and individual dances, are brief biographies of the choreographers—including Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Elaine Summers, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown, Deborah Hay and Simone Forti —excerpts from journals and interviews, and analysis.

Contradictory statements about the same dance gleaned from personal diaries or from what people can remember, and vastly different views of critics who were writing at the time, are juxtaposed. Although this kind of ironic and humorous organization of the material is present, the facts are not subordinated to a thesis or point of view; rather they are presented in such a way that the reader may encounter them more or less directly and make up his or her own mind about them.

Democracy's Body is an important contribution to the study of avant-garde dance, as well as a record of a particular historical movement. Judson Dance Theater, the first avant-garde movement in dance theatre since the modern dance of the 1930s and 1940s, occurred within the context of experimentation in several art forms. Banes conveys the adventure in the air as visual artists, dancers and musicians met to discuss existentialism, phenomenology and Zen Buddhism, and to collaborate in diverse performance works. John Cage and Merce Cunningham's use of chance structures opened up new composition possibilities. Ordinary life was regarded

as a zone of insight and surprise. The emphasis was on spontaneity, immediacy and doing the impossible. This excellent reference book about the early Judson period contains photographs of dances and a bibliography for further reading.

Laurie Lassiter

Theory of the Avant-Garde
Peter Burger
Theory and History of Literature, Volume 4
University of Minnesota Press; 136 pp. (plus 56 pp. foreword); $25.00 (cloth); $10.95 (paper)

The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge
Jean-François Lyotard
Foreword by Fredric Jameson
Theory and History of Literature, Volume 10
University of Minnesota Press; 112 pp. (plus 26 pp. foreword); $19.50 (cloth); $8.95 (paper)

These two volumes represent important contributions to the state of "Continental theory" which has caused a radical re-evaluation of philosophy and aesthetics in recent years. One of the problems with this theoretical enterprise has been the fact that these theories remain ethnocentric, with an emphasis on European art and culture as the *prima face* apex of cultural development. The "postmodern" condition represents an acknowledgement of contingency as a primary factor in discourse, that is, the idea of relativity becomes a pervasive ideological reality. The idea of the work of art as an arbiter of "truth" becomes devalued, as the possibility of alternative points of view is propounded. Of course, this is the result of the theoretical implications of "the avant-garde," as Peter Burger's essay makes clear. The implications for the establishment of "knowledge" have created a crisis in the very nature of discourse, with the attendant possibility of duplicity or deception in *any* utterance now held in abeyance, resulting in the trauma of cultural relativity.

One of the insights gained from a reading of Burger and Lyotard is the difficulties in accepting the potential freedom in the decentralizing of cultural imperatives. If the point of view of Western culture, a rationalist perspective which attempted to emphasize "progress," is subject to continual redefinition, the very nature of "definition" in discourse becomes suspect and must be reconsidered. For this reason, the process of critical inquiry, of thought as a precept, of analytic functioning, becomes one which cannot claim the conclusion of teleology. For this reason, speculative practices, such as philosophy and art, redefine the aims in terms of process, thus the rise in conceptualism in art practice and the emphasis on data processing in

analytic fields.

Although the postmodern procedures have been the primary mode of continuity in most cultural realms, these volumes help make evident the fact that the theatre remains resistant to the full development of contemporaneity, for such a development would require an intelligent application of the awareness of alternatives. Instead, the theatre remains, by and large, tied to traditions of narrative continuity which inhibit the acknowledgement of contingency and relativity. There is no place in the theatre for an enterprise which would foster uncertainty, for the base of the theatre remains tied to the notion of "entertainment," a notion which has been increasingly under attack in the most serious realms of discourse. The theatre, then, will be mired in the miasma of triviality until the possibility of discourse which is not allied to the pleasure principle is embraced by the practitioners.

Theory of the Avant-Garde and *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* are stimulating and provocative; however, in both cases, the actual essay is very short, and the volumes are padded out with lengthy introductory essays (which are quite good, by the way). The exorbitant prices of these volumes make the series as a whole inaccessible to many of the people who might have an interest in such writing. This protest (regarding the economic practices in the current culture) is made in order to acknowledge what Burger calls "the production apparatus" which makes the conditions of our culture a continual reflection of class structure and elitism.

Daryl Chin

TWO SHEPARD TITLES FROM PAJ PUBLICATIONS

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Edited by Bonnie Marranca

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Recommended. (LIBRARY JOURNAL)

Chosen by CHOICE as one of the "outstanding academic books" of 1981.

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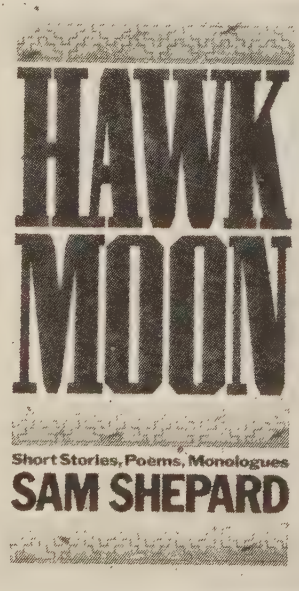

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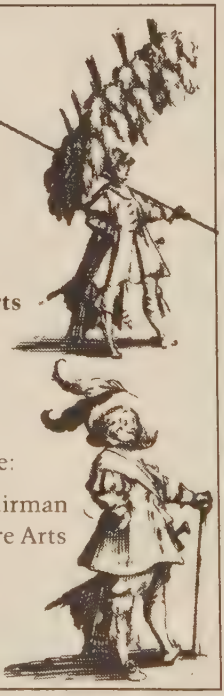

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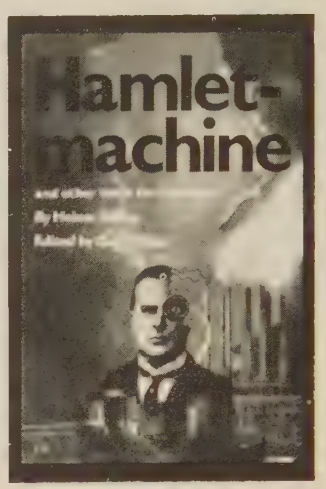

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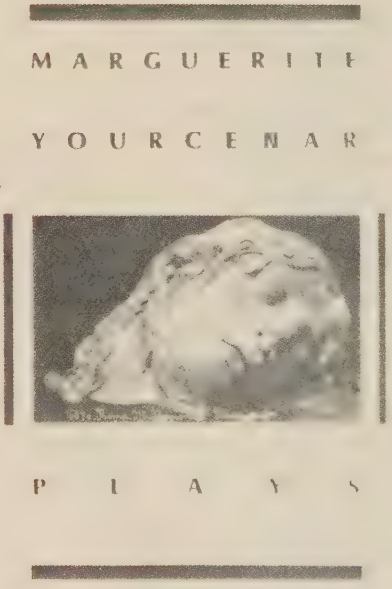

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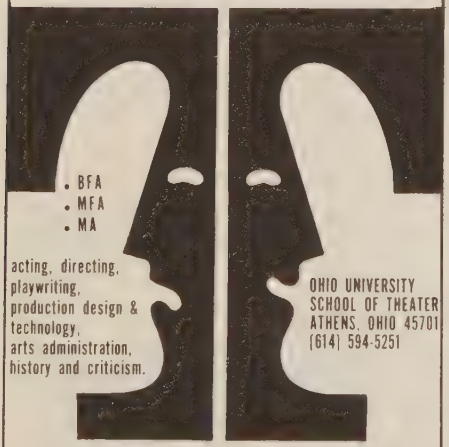

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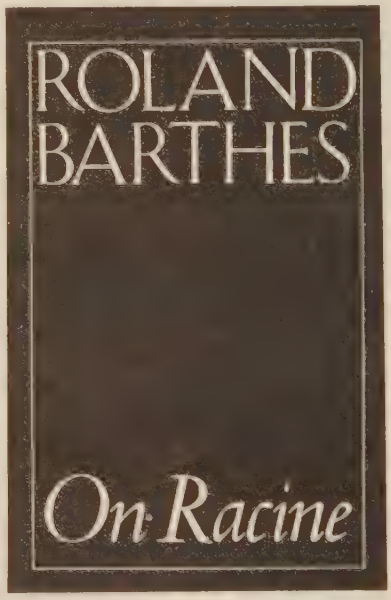

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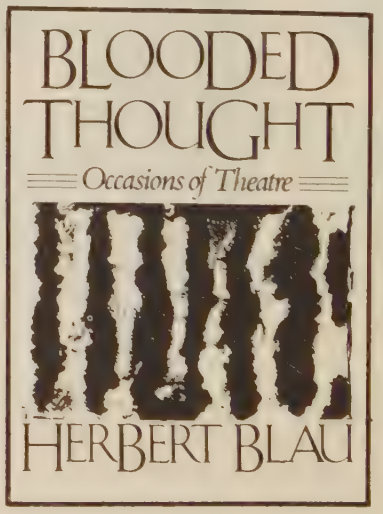

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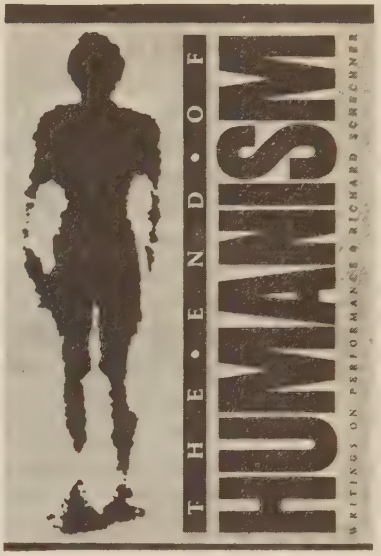

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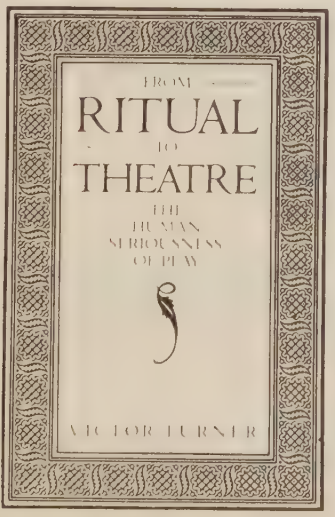

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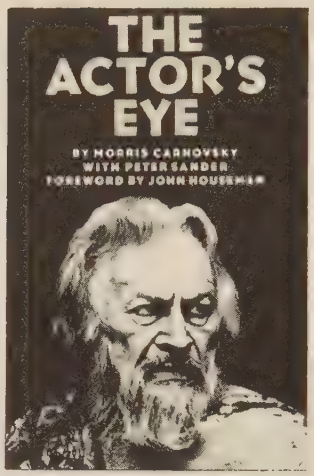

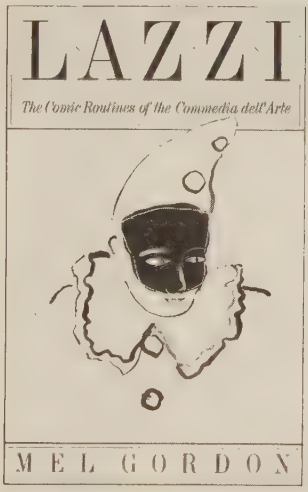

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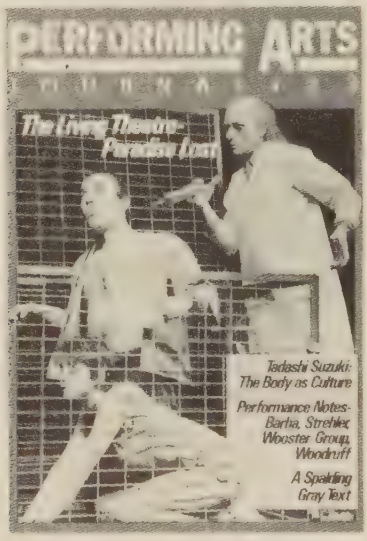

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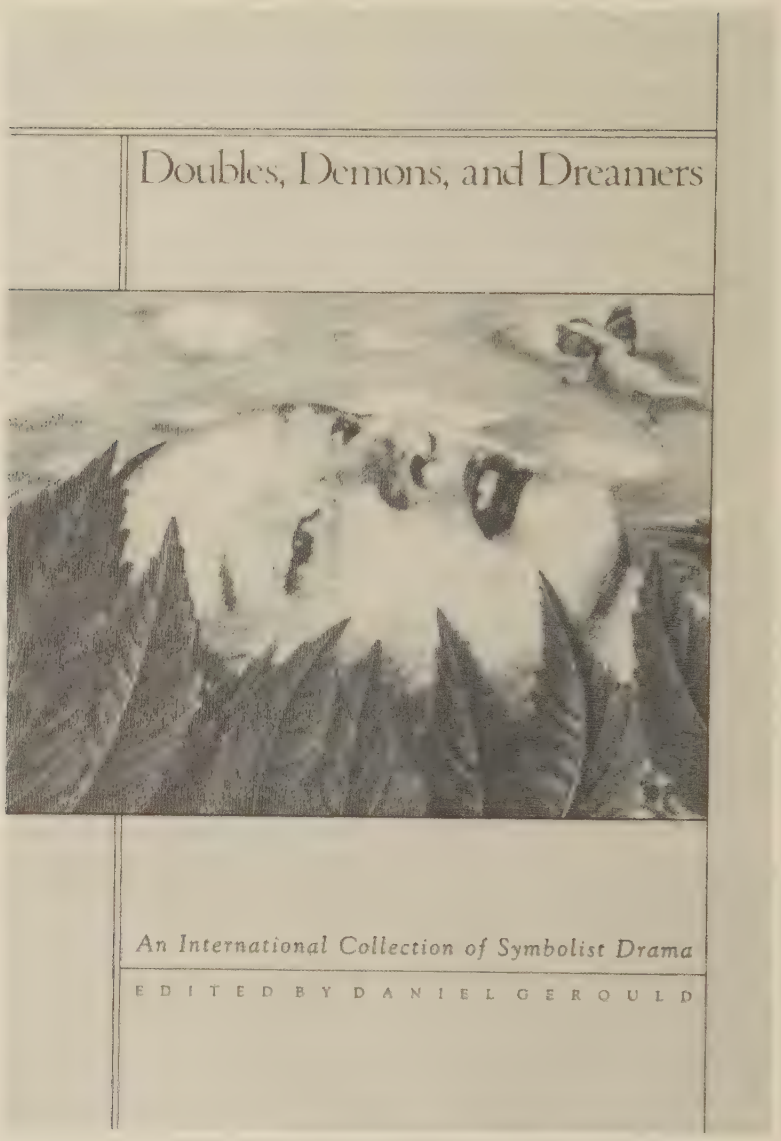

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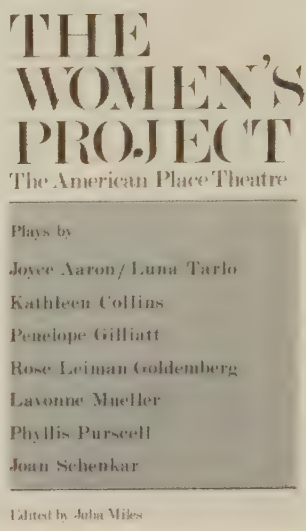

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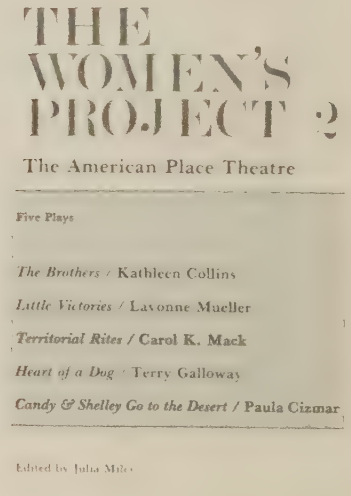
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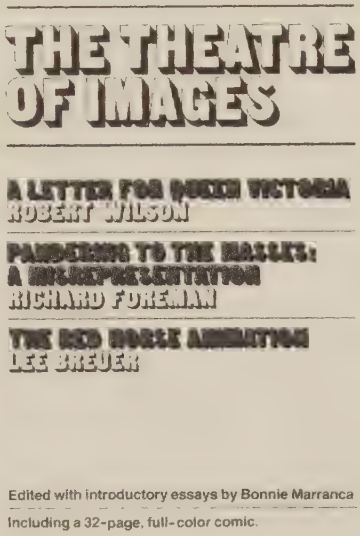

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